

**Negotiating identities: sex, gender and nation
in the fiction of women writers from Taiwan**

Carol Rennie

**PhD
The University of Edinburgh
2005**

THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

Name of Candidate:	Carol Marion Rennie
Address :	
Postal Code:	
Degree:	PhD
Title of Thesis:	Negotiating identities: sex, gender and nation in the fiction of women writers from Taiwan
No. of words in the main text:	ca. 80,000

This thesis examines the discourses on Chinese identity, particularly female identity, in the fiction of three women writers from Taiwan. It provides a comprehensive summary of the published fiction of Chen Ruoxi, Ouyang Zi and Li Li from 1962 to 2000, referring also to the work of other contemporary women writers and the Taiwan literary scene. It analyses the work in detail on the topics of sexuality, gender roles and national identity within the critical frameworks provided by feminist literary theory, postcolonial theory and diaspora studies.

Chen Ruoxi was born in Taiwan to a Taiwanese family of humble origins; Ouyang Zi was born in Japan to an elite Taiwanese family; Li Li was born in mainland China and grew up in an army village in southern Taiwan. They all graduated from National Taiwan University in the 1960s, beginning their literary careers in the student-run journal *Modern Literature* (*Xiandai wenxue*). Like many other influential writers of their generation, they went on to study and settle in the United States, continuing to publish in Chinese for readers in Taiwan, Hong Kong and the People's Republic of China. Their backgrounds represent a spectrum of Taiwanese experience and their work, still read today, encompasses most of the main literary trends in Taiwan in the latter half of the twentieth century: Modernism (*xiandai wenxue*), Nativism (*xiangtu wenxue*), overseas literature (*haiwai wenxue*), and women's literature (*nüxing wenxue*).

A prominent theme in women's literature is relationships between the sexes. My investigation of literary portrayals of sex and desire explores the production of meanings around female sexuality for Taiwan readers, according the literature its own role as an influential cultural practice which structures and reproduces as well as contests cultural perceptions, values and norms. My analysis looks at depictions of adolescent desire, the construction and deconstruction of the Orientalised East and the sexualised West, and explores the discourses that create the Chinese woman as a desiring, or desirable, individual.

The intersection of gender with identity is problematic: in nationalist movements women are often assigned symbolic roles as cultural markers of propriety and tradition. This thesis examines the effect that the sex of the narrator has on the themes and plots of stories concerned with Chinese identity. It reveals that the fiction is at times complicit in recycling stereotyped roles for women, particularly where male narrators are employed. Where female narrators are employed, however, gender issues often appear to be privileged over national and political issues.

The political divides of transnational China and the rise of local identity politics in Taiwan make national identity a complicated issue for overseas Chinese writers. This thesis looks at the identifications of the authors in relation to China and Taiwan. It examines their treatment of race, ethnicity and national identity through analysis of their fictional characters: Jewish, Black and Chinese Americans; overseas Chinese; and Chinese from Taiwan, Hong Kong and the People's Republic of China.

DECLARATION

This thesis has been composed by me. It has not been submitted in any previous application for a degree. All quotations have been distinguished by quotation marks and all sources of information have been acknowledged.

Carol Rennie

10 July 2004

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to all those who have supported me financially, academically and morally throughout the long years I have spent working (or not working!) on this thesis.

In my first year, I was grateful for the financial support of a postgraduate teaching fellowship at the University of Edinburgh. In my second year, I was awarded a British Association for Chinese Studies scholarship for study in Taiwan: many thanks to the Ministry of Education, and to the British Council Taipei for taking me on on terms flexible enough to allow me to pursue my research interests. A postgraduate research fellowship from the Arts and Humanities Research Board gave me two years' relief from having to earn my keep; the British Academy, to which I then turned for an income, has been particularly good in granting me time off work. I would like to thank especially my colleagues Jane Lyddon and Francine Danaher, for absorbing that extra burden with such good will.

My supervisor, Professor Bonnie McDougall, has been a patient and understanding mentor, providing a model of hard work, dedication and scholarship to which I could only ever aspire. I am very thankful for the time she has spent reading and editing my work, and for her constant encouragement. Thanks also to my second supervisor, Dr Tommy McClellan, and the friends and colleagues in Edinburgh and London with whom I have shared ideas: Daffyd Fell, Mark Harrison, Margaret Hillenbrand, Michel Hockx, Huang Liling, Shih Fang-long, Linan Tsai, Xu Jian, and many others.

Frances Weightman has been a housemate, confidante, model of scholarly and personal conduct, and the anchor that has kept me attached to this project. I count myself lucky to be her friend. Oliver Kramer provided a haven for my last push to the finish, and I am forever in his debt for his support, advice, and, most of all, wonderful food and hospitality.

Finally, I owe most of all to my parents, Sylvia and Tom Rennie, and to my partner, Massimo Poesio, who have provided generous moral and financial support throughout my ups and downs. Thank you!

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Primary Texts

Secondary Literature

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis presents a survey of the fiction of three women writers from Taiwan: 歐陽子 Ouyang Zi, 陳若曦 Chen Ruoxi, and 李黎 Li Li. Between them, their work represents most of the main literary trends in Taiwan, yet each of the authors is known only for certain aspects of her work: Ouyang Zi for her “modernist” writing, Chen Ruoxi for her “nativism” and Cultural Revolution “scar literature,” and Li Li for her “floating exile” stories and popular fiction. My study is the first to look at all the published fiction of these three writers, from 1960 to 2000, and the first to consider them alongside each other, providing evidence of common themes and approaches.

Questions of identity and authenticity are particularly important for writers in the Republic of China on Taiwan and the Chinese diaspora, separated from the spiritual home of mainland China. Women writers from Taiwan are active contributors to the fictional discourse that engages in the imagining of Chinese and Taiwanese cultural and national identities. This thesis adopts an explicitly feminist approach, choosing to focus specifically on women writers in order to investigate how they approach the problem of gendered subjectivity in relation to identity: the relationship of the female subject to her sexed body, to her gender role, and to the dominant culture in which her gender is inscribed.

1.1 Selection of writers

I was first introduced to modern Taiwan literature in the mid-1990s, reading a volume of selected fiction from *Modern Literature* (現代文學 *Xiandai Wenxue*),¹ a student-run literary journal of the 1960s which fostered many of what were to become Taiwan’s most prominent contemporary writers.² In selecting the writers on which to base my study of identity negotiations in the work of women, I decided to choose writers who had launched their literary careers in this journal, and who also fitted the following criteria: a) that they should have grown up in post-retrocession Taiwan; b) that they should have gone on to the United States, coming into contact with the radical transformations in the United States of the 1960s and 1970s; and c) that they should have continued to publish for the home audience in Taiwan.

The choice of Ouyang Zi, Chen Ruoxi and Li Li ensured that as well as representing a range of literary styles, my survey would include writers whose biographies represented a

¹ Pinyin is used throughout this thesis to transliterate Chinese, with the exception of the names of well-known individuals, political parties etc. which are commonly referred to in English texts with alternative romanizations.

² Ouyang Zi, ed. 現代文學小說選集 *Xiandai wenxue xiaoshuo xuanji* (Selected Fiction from *Modern Literature*), 2 Vols. (Taipei: Erya, 1977).

wide spectrum of Taiwan society in terms of historical background, ethnicity and class. Ouyang Zi was born in Japan to an elite Taiwanese family; Chen Ruoxi was born in Taiwan to a Taiwanese family of humble origins; Li Li was born in mainland China and grew up in an army village in southern Taiwan. Both Chen Ruoxi and Li Li were politically blacklisted in Taiwan until the 1980s: Chen, famously, for her repatriation to the People's Republic of China, where she spent seven arduous years during the Cultural Revolution, and Li Li for her participation in the Diaoyutai movement in the United States. She too had visited the mainland several times before she was able to return to Taiwan again.

1.2 Genre

The three writers of this study have all been labelled "overseas Chinese writers," and their readership is not limited to Taiwan; a significant proportion of their output has been published in the People's Republic and Hong Kong as well as in Taipei. Much of the work first appeared in journals, periodicals and the newspaper literary supplements. This thesis considers the work as published in book form in Taiwan, except in the relatively rare cases when a story was not included in the Taiwan version of a particular collection for political reasons (details will be given).

The fictional work of the three authors consists mainly of short stories, plus some novellas and a few full-length novels. Each has also published numerous collections of short prose and essays, some of which are referred to in the course of my analysis, but only as an adjunct to the primary work of analysing the fiction.³

Judgements on the "quality" of literature are inevitably constructed by specific (often masculinist and ethnocentric) historical and cultural discourses. Women writers are often overlooked in the establishment of literary canons, and the "negative reception that has been afforded to modern Chinese literature . . . by certain critics in the Western academy" is still a contentious issue in Chinese Studies.⁴ As my primary interest is the sociological consideration of gender and identity, I do not attempt a detailed discussion of narrative style and technique, or an assessment of the literary merits of the texts.⁵

With the exception of a few experimental stories, the three writers all tend to employ direct, stylistically simple prose, using ordinary language, realistic settings and clear

³ Full bibliographies of both fiction and non-fiction are appended.

⁴ Gregory B Lee, "Contempt for the Contemporary: Orientalists, Western Marxists and Chinese Poetry" in Gregory B Lee, *Troubadours, Trumpeters, Troubled Makers: Lyricism, nationalism, and hybridity in China and its Others* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1996), 93.

⁵ Yvonne Chang provides an excellent discussion of these aspects of Taiwan's contemporary fiction: Yvonne Sung-sheng Chang, *Modernism and the Nativist Resistance: Contemporary Chinese Fiction from Taiwan* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 38-47.

themes. Minimally mediated narration and description preserves the realistic illusion, and authorial presence is generally subdued, although in the case of Chen Ruoxi many of the sympathetic first person narrators frequently serve as mouthpieces for the author. A number of the texts achieve irony through apparent disparity between point of view of the “implied author” and the characters. This technique is not characteristic of traditional Chinese fiction, and contemporary reactions to the literature indicate that many readers and critics unfamiliar with the device failed to perceive authorial distancing effects. More often, readers would seek to identify with the text, readers using plots to serve as ‘conduct books’ or manuals for living.⁶

A very common characteristic of overseas Chinese writing, particularly by women, is its semi-autobiographical nature: fiction featuring characters with similar biographies to the authors; featuring the same political and personal life-events as those experienced by the authors; set in real time and referring to historical people and events.⁷ This applies fully to Chen Ruoxi’s fiction, partially to Li Li’s fiction, but only marginally to Ouyang Zi’s work.

The approach that best describes my own engagement with the texts is that of “reading with gender on the agenda”: reading with a concern for gender issues that affect the writing and reading of texts.⁸ Sara Mills uses the term “authentic realism” to describe what she calls a “feminist reading strategy” rather than an articulated theoretical position, which grew from the consciousness raising movement of the 1970s when women “use[d] literature as a means of gaining insight into their own lives . . . [discussing texts] in terms of how they related to individual women’s lives, and how far women identified with the female characters.”⁹ Mills describes the authentic realist approach as having developed alongside a growth in fictional writing by women which was positioned as highly autobiographical and which invited the reader to draw on the link between the female author and her text. The critical position is often purposely anti-theoretical, and encompasses a certain degree of self-revelation on the part of the critic, in order to “stress[] the solidarity which . . . feminists have with . . . women readers.”

There are problems in some of the assumptions of this reading strategy: it tends to perceive literature and life as intimately connected to each other, its assumption of

⁶ Fictional narrative often functions to encode ideology. Miller demonstrates that through identifying with a heroine, female readers are often socialized in the values of a dominant culture: Nancy Miller, *The Heroine’s Text* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).

⁷ Elizabeth Croll, *Changing Identities of Chinese Women: Rhetoric, experience and self-perception in twentieth-century China* (London and New York: Hong Kong University Press, 1995), 9.

⁸ Lizbeth Goodman ed., *Literature and Gender* (The Open University: London, 1996), viii.

⁹ Sara Mills, “Authentic Realism,” in Sara Mills et al. eds., *Feminist Readings, Feminists Reading* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), 51-82.

authenticity omitting the question of textuality. Reading cross-culturally, there is a danger of making false assumptions regarding the shared experience and understanding of women. Nonetheless, Mills defends the approach against the criticism of some feminist theorists,¹⁰ suggesting, alongside Gayatri Spivak, that occupying this type of reading strategy temporarily, in certain circumstances, can be useful and enabling.¹¹

As I will demonstrate, the authentic realist approach chimes most closely with the understanding and intentions of both the authors and their Taiwanese critics and readers with regard to the function and purpose of literature. My critical reading thus broadly adopts this approach, while seeking at the same time to incorporate more nuanced theoretical understandings of the function and operation of literary texts in relation to the discourses of sexuality, gender and national identity.

1.3 Historical Background

A poor island on the periphery of the Chinese empire in 1895, Taiwan was populated by nine major aboriginal tribes and a larger group of long-established Fujianese (Hokkien in the local dialect) and Hakkas of Chinese origin. A process of modernization began under Japanese occupation between 1895 to 1945, when Japanese language and culture was taught in schools, although social organisation and religious beliefs remained largely Chinese. Taiwan reverted to the control of the Republic of China at the end of World War II, and resinicizing of the Taiwanese became the primary aim of the nationalist Kuomintang government (KMT). Mandarin Chinese was established as the official language, and primary education was made universal, exclusively in Mandarin. The transition was a difficult one. On 28 February 1947 an uprising against the Nationalists was followed by a massacre of Taiwanese local elites and intellectuals, known as the 2-28 Incident. In 1949 Chiang Kai-shek retreated to Taiwan from the mainland after losing the civil war against the Communists, accompanied by over a million officials, soldiers and refugees. The Republic of China was re-formed on Taiwan, martial law was imposed, and many more people were killed or imprisoned between 1949 and 1953, during the “white terror” of Nationalist government action to root out communists and opposition activists.

The next four decades saw immense economic growth and technological development on the island, despite increasing political isolation following recognition of the

¹⁰ Ibid, 57. Mills quotes Toril Moi mocking the authentic realists’ call for affirmative portrayals of women: “Instead of strong happy tractor drivers and factory workers, we are now presumably, to demand strong happy *women* tractor drivers,” Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (Methuen, London, 1985), 57.

¹¹ Gayatri Spivak, “Imperialism and Sexual Difference,” in *Sexual Difference Conference Proceedings* (Oxford Literary Review, Southampton, 1986), 225-240.

People's Republic of China by most Western nations during the 1970s. Political tensions were high throughout the 1970s: protests spread throughout the Chinese-speaking world when the US government yielded administration of the Diaoyutai Islands to Tokyo in 1971.¹² Public opposition to the KMT's lack of a vigorous defence of its territorial rights spurred on further opposition activities in and outside of Taiwan, including calls for greater respect for human rights and the rule of law, and a curtailment of the KMT government's privileges. Political parties were banned, but the opposition, known as the 黨外 *Dangwai* movement (literally "outside the party") became increasingly organised and vocal. In the 美麗島 *Meilidao* incident a political rally in Kaohiung was harshly repressed, with long prison sentences imposed on the key participants. One of the activists, Lin Yixiong, was badly beaten in prison, and his mother and two daughters were murdered while under 24-hour police surveillance.¹³

The state gradually switched from authoritarian policies of negative control to more liberal, positive cultural programmes.¹⁴ In 1987 martial law was lifted and local opposition political parties legalized. The 1988 appointment of Lee Teng-hui as the first native-born president symbolised the beginning of the end of the domination of politics by those who had fled from the mainland after the war: the formal state of war was ended in 1991 and travel restrictions between Taiwan and the mainland were relaxed for civilians. With the election of President Chen Shui-bian in 2000 and the peaceful transfer of power from the Nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) government to the opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), Taiwan's reputation as a stable democracy was consolidated, threatened only by aggression from the People's Republic of China, which has not rescinded its threat to take back the island by force.¹⁵

1.3.1 The ethnic divide

Although both the long-established natives of Taiwan and the refugees from the mainland are ethnically Han Chinese, and both groups are themselves made up of further subethnic groups, a clear divide has existed between these two major population groups. This is generally interpreted as an ethnic divide, although many of the original tensions

¹² See Mab Huang, *Intellectual Ferment for Political Reforms in Taiwan, 1971-1973* (University of Michigan: Ann Arbor, 1976).

¹³ John Kaplan, *The Court-Martial of the Kaohsiung Defendants*. (University of California: Institute of East Asian Studies Research Papers and Policy Studies No. 2, 1981).

¹⁴ For more detail about Nationalist cultural policy and its implementation, see Edwin A. Winckler, "Cultural Policy on Postwar Taiwan" in S Harrell & C C Huang eds., *Cultural Change in Postwar Taiwan* (Taipei: Westview Publishing, 1994).

¹⁵ For further background on Taiwan's political history, see Denny Roy, *Taiwan: A Political History* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003)

stemmed more from class and power imbalances than ethnic differences: the newly arrived Mainlanders dominated high-ranking positions in government, the military and education, spoke Mandarin Chinese, and treated the Taiwanese who had fraternised with the Japanese with suspicion.

The original Chinese residents of the island are collectively termed 本省人 *benshengren* (literally “this province people”), while those who settled in Taiwan after 1945 are referred to as 外省人 *waishengren* (literally “outside province people”). Current residents of the Chinese mainland are known as 大陸人 *daluren* (literally, “mainlanders”). Somewhat confusingly, the standard English terms for *benshengren* and *waishengren*, “Taiwanese” and “Mainlanders” respectively, are equally applicable in distinguishing between current citizens of the Republic of China on Taiwan (ROC) and of the People’s Republic of China (PRC).¹⁶ In this thesis, the terms “Taiwanese” and “Mainlanders” will be used to refer to people from the different ethnic blocs within Taiwan, necessitating rather clumsier formulations to describe citizens of the two separate political entities: I will refer to people “from Taiwan”; and “from the PRC” or “mainland.” “Chinese” indicates both the Mandarin language and the larger ethnic group which encompasses people from both sides of the Taiwan Straits and beyond (華人 *huaren*). “China” in this thesis will refer to the mainland, with “greater China” used to encompass the ROC, PRC and Hong Kong.

Differences between people of Mainland and Taiwanese descent have begun to fade as second and third generation Mainlanders are born in Taiwan. Although the debate about unification with or independence from the mainland still thrives, most citizens of the Republic of China on Taiwan see themselves as having a distinct identity of their own.¹⁷

1.3.2 Women

The 1947 Constitution of the Republic of China incorporates equal rights for women. In the Civil Code of 1921, women are entitled to the same rights and assume the same obligations as men on reaching majority. No discrimination is made on the basis of sex or marital status in terms of the right of inheritance. Under family law, however, the husband has the right to manage joint property, and the wife has to take the domicile of the husband as her domicile, unless otherwise agreed. Children are named after the father, unless the wife has no family line and the husband agrees to them taking her name. Until the

¹⁶ Emily Martin Ahern and Hill Gates eds., *The Anthropology of Taiwanese Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981).

¹⁷ Mainlanders are often assumed to be pro-unification, and a significant proportion of the Taiwanese pro-independence, but these distinctions are simplifications. See Stephan Corcuff, 風和日暖：台灣外省人與國家認同的轉變 *Feng He Ri Nuan: Taiwan Waishengren yu Guojia Rentong de Zhuanbian* (Warm

law was changed in the late 1990s, custody of children in case of divorce or separation was automatically granted exclusively to the father.

Women's status in society is strongly affected by cultural traditions, regardless of equality afforded to them by law. Taiwan has inherited the strongly patriarchal values of traditional China, with the Nationalist government putting great emphasis on traditional values, in order to counteract the drastic social and political changes on the mainland. Through state-organized women's groups and the official media, women were encouraged to play supportive and subservient roles at home and in society.

The first stirrings of a woman's movement in Taiwan began in the mid 1970s under Annette Lu Hsiu-lien, a young female intellectual who had studied in the United States. Lu's brand of feminism was much more conservative than her Western counterparts, preserving stereotyped concepts of gender, but she argued strongly for women's right to be considered equal partners to men, and against double standards regarding marriage and chastity. She was regarded as a radical by the nationalist government, and after the *Meilidao* incident she was imprisoned between 1980 and 1985 on charges of involvement with illegal campaign activities. Her consciousness-raising work was continued in a woman's magazine, *Awakenings*, established in 1982, and feminist themes began to enter women's magazines, newspaper columns and creative fiction. Lu went on to become Taiwan's best known female politician: in 2000 she was elected to the post of Vice-President of Taiwan.

There is a proliferation of women's groups in Taiwan: I attended an exhibition in 1999 at which over one hundred separate organisations were represented, ranging from business networking associations to anti-prostitution groups to a group dedicated to the collection of oral histories from Taiwan's grandmothers. Generally, however, a conservative gender ideology still prevails in Taiwan. The mainstream women's movement seeks to be conciliatory and constructive in its attempts to improve the situation of women. A small group of radical activists, however, regularly incites waves of horrified reaction from the establishment with high-profile awareness-raising campaigns on issues such as the rights of sex-workers, VAT on female sanitary products, and sexual harassment. The witty rallying cry: 只要性高潮, 不要性騷擾 *zhi yao xing gaochao, bu yao xing shaorao!* ("We want orgasms, not sexual harassment!") exemplifies the tactics of Josephine Ho, an academic and women's rights activist who has established a Centre for the Study of Sexualities at Taiwan's National Central University.

1.4 The Literary Scene

Taiwan during the early 1950s has been described as a 'literary desert.'¹⁸ Taiwanese intellectuals, many of whom wrote in Japanese, were repressed both linguistically and politically.¹⁹ Writers who had immigrated from the mainland were cut off from their roots, with many of their contemporaries remaining in China. Many of the newcomers still looked forward to recovery of the mainland, seeing themselves as only temporary residents of Taiwan. Virtually all mainland literature from the May Fourth period on was proscribed by government, and critical realism was stigmatized in politically sensitive Taiwan: any criticism of the new society was invariably associated with communist sympathies. Most of the work produced during this decade was conservative and non-political: nostalgia for the mainland and recollections of friends left behind, anecdotes of the war, and love stories. Women writers featured prominently, as the less politically sensitive May Fourth issue of women's emancipation continued to provide material for socially-engaged authors.

During the late 1950s, T A Hsia, a Mainlander professor of Western literature teaching at National Taiwan University (NTU), urged his young students to write realistically about life on Taiwan in a new magazine, *The Literary Review* (文學雜誌 *Wenxue zazhi*). In the inaugural edition of the magazine, Hsia writes: "Though we live in a time of great chaos, we do not want our literature to be chaotic. . . . Our conviction is: a serious writer must be the one who can reflect for us the zeitgeist of our time. We are not after the beauty of language for its own sake, for we feel that it is more important for us to speak the truth."²⁰ This magazine ran from 1956 to 1960, when a number Hsia's students embarked upon a more ambitious literary programme, launching what became known as the Modernist literary movement (現代文學運動 *Xiandai wenxue yundong*). In their new journal, *Modern Literature*, they introduced many Western Modernist writers alongside their own creative work, with the intention of "trying, seeking, and creating new artistic forms and styles" in Chinese literature.²¹ They engaged in technical experimentation and the exploration of modernist devices such as Freudian symbolism and stream-of-consciousness narration.

¹⁸ Lucy Chen [Chen Ruoxi], "Literary Formosa" in Mark Mancall ed. *Formosa Today* (New York and London: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), 131-141

¹⁹ For an English introduction to and collection of literature from the Japanese period, mostly written in Japanese, see Rosemary Haddon, *Oxcart: Nativist Stories from Taiwan 1934-1977* (translated and with introduction by Rosemary Haddon), (Dortmund: Projekt-Verlag, 1996).

²⁰ Quoted in Leo Ou-fan Lee, "'Modernism' and 'Romanticism' in Taiwan Literature," Jeannette L Faurot ed., *Chinese Fiction from Taiwan: Critical Perspectives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980).

²¹ *Xiandai wenxue* (Modern Literature) No. 1 (March 1960): 2. Although modern in form, style and technical devices, the content of Modernist literature shares little of Western Modernism's consciousness of cultural crisis. For a detailed discussion of the Modernists, see Chang, *Modernism and the Nativist Resistance*.

Although Modernism was confined mainly to academia, it inspired a fierce reaction from “Nativist” critics, who blasted Modernist literature as empty posturing and slavish imitation of Western literature. They called for a local literature about the ordinary people and customs of the region. The social and humanistic concerns and liberal realism of the Nativist literary movement (鄉土文學運動 *Xiangtu wenxue yundong*), inspired many Taiwanese to write about rural Taiwan in a mixture of Mandarin and Taiwanese.

The literary debate died down as the Nativist movement became increasingly politicized, many of its proponents turning to oppositional politics. At the same time, virtually all of the founding members of *Modern Literature* went on to the United States for postgraduate study. They could not see a future for themselves in the repressive and isolated atmosphere of Taiwan under the Nationalist government: the phrase went: “Roll up, roll up for NTU, and go, go, go, to the USA!” (來, 來, 來, 來台大; 去, 去, 去, 去美國! *Lai, lai, lai, lai Taida; qu, qu, qu, qu Meiguo!*) Moving overseas did not cut these writers’ links with home: they continued to publish actively in Taiwan, some of Taiwan’s main newspaper supplements even being accused of having become “overseas writers’ territorial holdings.”²²

The publishing industry in Taiwan boomed in the 1980s and 1990s; Taiwan has one of the largest per capita publishing industries in the world. Social realism has become the mainstream: the social consciousness of the Nativists drawing on the technical innovations of the Modernists. New global literary trends such as post-modernism and gay and lesbian literature have been avidly taken up and developed in the creative and critical fields, and a new genre of literature which might be termed “experiential narratives” forms part of a concerted and conscious attempt to explore Taiwanese identity and develop a specifically Taiwanese canon. This fiction reflects the diverse experiences of the aborigines; the early Chinese settlers in Taiwan; life under Japanese colonialism; the impact of martial law, the 2-28 incident and the white terror; the Mainlander military village experience; and the effects of economic development and urbanisation on Taiwan.

Women writers feature prominently, often dominating best-seller lists. Portrayals of modern women (usually urban, educated and professional) form the basis of a large proportion of these stories. Thematic concerns of love, sex, marriage, the family and work reflect both the position of women in contemporary society, and larger social and political issues. The appeal of these stories to a wide readership reflects a growing interest in social and women’s issues, as Taiwanese women struggle to define their own identities and priorities amidst fast-paced modernization and changing social structures.

²² Chen Ruoxi, “Prologue: Chinese Overseas Writers and Nativism,” in Hsin-sheng C Kao ed. *Nativism*

1.5 Methodology

Western feminism is not a unified, coherent ideology, but feminist aims are broadly based on the common goal of examining and understanding the social and psychological mechanisms that construct and perpetuate gender inequality, with a view to changing them. Feminist literary criticism in the West has established gender as a fundamental category of literary analysis, developing methods of looking at literature which examine the effects of literary discourse. Literature is seen as not merely representative of real life, offering heightened perceptions of social reality, but also as involved in the production of meaning: an influential cultural practice embodied in powerful institutions, intimately involved in shaping and structuring cultural perceptions, values and ideals. All literary criticism is political, as is any body of theory which concerns itself with human meaning, value, language, feeling and experience. Feminist literary criticism is expressly so. Reading texts as historical phenomena, feminist critics aim to examine the discursive practices which propagate gender inequality and look for new approaches, particularly by women writers, which provide an alternative to perceptions of gender based on difference and separation.

Feminist criticism has constantly engaged in dialogue with itself, as well as with various patriarchal institutions. Humanist individualist feminism associated with the Anglo-American tradition and French poststructural feminism has been criticised for its tendency to universalise the experience and literary history of Western, white, middle-class heterosexual women. The feminist debate has opened up to include postcolonial, black, class and lesbian feminist criticism. Poststructuralism, which broke down traditional concepts of the unified, gendered, sovereign subject, was embraced by many feminists in the 1980s as representing liberation from a restrictive definition of gendered identity. However, the political agenda of feminism requires that women retain some sense of the subject as agent of history and meaning, in order to effect change. Many feminists are suspicious about postmodernist deconstruction of the category "woman". Whilst trying to avoid the traps of essentialism, they see the necessity of establishing solidarity amongst women, a "politics of identification" as opposed to a "politics of identity". Although not a unitary category, "woman" can become a unifying category, even across cultural divides.²³ In the same way, despite proclamations of "the death of the author" in discourse theory, many feminists argue for a pragmatic reinscription of the specificity of author and reader as woman,

Overseas: Contemporary Chinese Woman Writers (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 10.

²³ Liz Stanley, "Recovering 'Women' in History from Historical Deconstructionism," and Avtar Brah, "Questions of Difference and International Feminism," in Stevi Jackson et al. Eds., *Women's Studies: A Reader* (New York:

recognising the experiential reality of gendered identities even as one attempts to deconstruct them.²⁴

Sinologists have studied and written about China for decades. Conscious interrogation of their own perceptions or theoretical frameworks, and the impact that these frameworks have on their understanding of and presentation of the culture under scrutiny, is a fairly recent phenomenon. In 1978, Edward Said's ground-breaking work *Orientalism* revealed the way in which the West had constructed the Orient as mysterious Other, expressing Western values and ideas as universal norms and creating an illusion of homogenous, stable self-identity through opposition to Eastern culture. Using Michel Foucault's proposition that all forms of knowledge are productive of power, Said argued that the Orient, as an object of Western knowledge, is thus subject to Western dominion. Said's logic draws on Simone de Beauvoir's Hegelian description of a male construction of the female as "other." Woman is identified negatively as all that is not male: the imaginary location of male dreams, idealisations and fears.²⁵ Said acknowledges the parallels and analogies between colonial relations and sexual relations, finding them illuminating of the reality of the imperial adventure.²⁶ Current Western scholarship on the position of women in Chinese society and Chinese women's literature has therefore begun to assess its own validity, possibilities and limitations, taking into account the debates surrounding both feminist and Orientalist discourse.

Afraid of further propagating an Orientalist gaze, some critics argue that it is invalid for Western critics to look at the situation of women in China through a hierarchy of Western theory imposed upon Chinese practice, and instead present the case for looking at China within a Chinese context, in view of China's own specific historical starting points and historical possibilities for women.²⁷ Li Xiaorong argues against such relativism, pointing out that local evaluation practices might be equally invalid. She sees cross-cultural scrutiny as having the potential to provide new, more universal perspectives which can only be of benefit.²⁸ In an anthropological context, Henrietta Moore celebrates the fruitful tension of cultural difference where new anthropological practices seek not to monopolise

Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993).

²⁴ Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (London: Routledge, 1996), 22-29.

²⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* [1949], translated by H. M. Parshley (London: Jonathon Cape, 1953).

²⁶ Edward W Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), 1978.

²⁷ Mechthild Leutner, "Chinabezogene Frauenforschung und geschlechterspezifischer Ansatz" (China-related feminist research and gender-specific approaches), in *Frauenstudien: Beiträge der Berliner China-Tagung 1991*, (München: Minerva, 1992), 25-37.

²⁸ Li Xiaorong, "Gender Equality in China and Cultural Relativism," in Martha Nussbaum and Jonathan Glover eds., *Women, Culture and Development: A Study of Human Capabilities* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 406-

interpretation and representation, but to produce work based on multiple authorship, where the people being studied can speak for themselves.²⁹

Although missionaries, ethnologists and scholars had written about women in China since the nineteenth century, specific concern with women only became firmly established as a sub-field of Chinese studies during the 1990s. Interest has developed from a primary concern with the victimization and marginalization of women in China to a focus on women as historical actors and co-producers in the construction of Chinese identity. Rey Chow maintains that female Chinese writers occupy a particularly crucial discursive space: "In the field of China studies, gender and women's issues are likely to emerge as the predominant critical paradigm in the years to come. . . . If the relative freedom in intellectual work that the Chinese living in the liberal West enjoy is a privilege, Chinese intellectuals must use this privilege as truthfully and as tactically as they can – not merely to speak as exotic minors, but to fight the crippling effects of Western imperialism and Chinese paternalism at once."³⁰

It is in this light that this thesis will examine the work of Ouyang Zi, Chen Ruoxi and Li Li: tracing the construction and the negotiation of gender and identity in the writings of specific woman writers as historical producers, positioned between China and the United States. At once part of, and critical observer/presenters of the Chinese experience in China, Taiwan, and in the United States, they occupy a space described by Homi Bhaba as a "cultural in-between," undertaking a "translation of cultures [which] whether assimilative or agonistic, is a complex act that generates borderline affects and identifications, 'peculiar types of culture sympathy and culture-clash'."³¹

1.6 Structure

Chapter Two introduces Ouyang Zi, Chen Ruoxi and Li Li separately, providing biographical information and a brief survey of their fiction. This is presented roughly chronologically, highlighting the settings, characters, and plots of the stories. Significant thematic concerns are briefly addressed, and a short summary of the reception and criticism of the work is provided.

Chapters Three, Four and Five, entitled Sexuality, Gender and Nation respectively, examine the fiction in terms of how it speaks to and within the inextricably linked

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²⁹ Henrietta Moore, *Feminism and Anthropology* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988), 193.

³⁰ Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 114.

³¹ Homi K Bhaba, "Culture's In-Between" in Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay eds., *Questions of Cultural Identity*

discourses that make up the ontological construction of sexual, gendered and national or racial identities. Each of these categories of identification is understood as a social construction, not as natural or biologically determined.

Sexuality cannot be considered in isolation from sex and gender, in that it is social understandings of sex and gender which determine how sexuality is constructed and expressed. In Chapter Three the term is understood to encompass all attitudes, beliefs and practices that might be seen to have sexual or erotic significance. Sexual awakening is one of the earliest themes of the writers' work. I examine descriptions of adolescent sexuality, the construction of desiring and desirable female individuals, the intersection of national identity with sexuality, sex and attitudes to sex in adult relationships, and the very cursory acknowledgement that the texts make to the existence of homosexuality.

Gender is used to refer to the cultural distinction between male and female, masculinity and femininity, and the attendant social divisions between women and men. Chapter Four looks at the authors' attitudes towards gender and examines the effect of narrative choices on the portrayal of female characters. It examines the negotiations of fictional characters with regard to their own gendered roles, and the ways in which constructions of national identity are gendered.

Nation is used to refer to the discourses and practices that create a collectivity, a national identity, based on a perception of shared ethnic, racial, political or historical origins. In Chapter Five, I look at the identifications of the authors and their characters in terms of how they perceive themselves: ethnically, racially, and in relation to the divided nation of China. With the understanding that identities are constructed through the creation of 'difference' and the exclusion of outsiders, I examine the way in which non-Chinese are depicted in the fiction.

Chapter 2: Life and work of the authors

2.1 Ouyang Zi

Ouyang Zi 歐陽子 was born Hong Zhihui 洪智惠 in Hiroshima, Japan in 1939. Her parents were from Nantou in southern Taiwan and returned to the island after retrocession in 1945. Her father, a judge, became a law professor at National Taiwan University, while her mother cared for the family of seven children. Ouyang Zi entered the Foreign Languages and Literatures department of National Taiwan University in 1957, becoming a founding member of *Modern Literature* in 1960. Graduating with a BA in English Literature in 1961, she stayed on as an assistant lecturer in the department until 1962, during which time she took over the editing of *Modern Literature*. She took courses in English literature at the University of Illinois with a Fulbright scholarship, obtaining a masters degree from the University of Iowa Workshop for Writers in 1964. In 1965 she moved to Texas with her husband, Yan Xianglin, where she raised three children and now resides permanently.

Ouyang Zi began publishing short essays and new poetry in newspapers and literary supplements at the age of thirteen. She turned her hand to fiction after becoming involved in the launch of *Modern Literature*, adopting the pen name Ouyang Zi and publishing fourteen short stories in the magazine between 1960 and 1969.¹ Two additional stories were published elsewhere, making a total of sixteen short stories, which were reproduced (with revisions and modifications in each reprinting, sometimes under new titles)² in four major collections: *The girl with long hair* 那長頭髮的女孩³ in 1967, *Autumn Leaves* 秋葉⁴ in 1971 and 1980, and two collections of selected fiction, published in 1982 and 1993.⁵

Problems with her eyesight made it increasingly difficult for Ouyang Zi to read and write from the early 1970s. She continued to produce personal essays, translations and criticism, but stopped writing fiction. Ouyang Zi has given various reasons for this. In an article written in 1982 she maintains that while she often cites lack of imagination and

¹ See Appendix 1 for a list of the stories as they appeared in *Modern Literature*. The pen name Ouyang Zi was suggested by her classmate and co-founder of *Modern Literature*, Chen Ruoxi.

² Many of the changes are technical improvements, resulting from lessons learned during Ouyang Zi's period of study at the Iowa Writers Workshop. A few stories undergo significant thematic changes: where relevant to this thesis, changes will be highlighted in close readings of the relevant texts.

³ Ouyang Zi, *Na chang toufa de nühai* 那長頭髮的女孩 (The girl with long hair) (Taipei: Wenxing shudian, 1967).

⁴ Ouyang Zi, *Qiu ye* 秋葉 (Autumn Leaves) (Taipei: Chenzhong chubanshe, 1971). Revised edition *Qiu ye* 秋葉 (Autumn Leaves) (Taipei: Erya, 1980). This edition includes an additional piece, and minor revisions to all fourteen stories. Unless otherwise indicated, this thesis uses the 1980 edition of *Autumn Leaves* as the standard reference.

⁵ Ouyang Zi *zixuanji* 歐陽子自選集 (Stories by Ouyang Zi selected by the author) (Taipei: Liming wenhua gongsi, 1982). Lin Ruimin, Chen Wanyi et al. eds., *Ouyang Zi ji* 歐陽子集 (Selected works by Ouyang Zi). (Short fiction series: the second postwar generation. Taipei: Qianwei, 1993).

experience, another primary reason was the fear of offending or hurting those around her: she recounts an incident when her father had charged her with exploiting the misery of others to satisfy her own desire to see her name in print. The decision to stop writing fiction is thus presented in moral terms: acknowledging that her sources of inspiration might well be the experiences of friends and relations, she writes that she had decided that this would be damaging to relationships. She could not put into practice the dictum she had learnt at the Iowa Writers Workshop: that any considerations that stood in the way of the creative process should be disregarded. "I am my father's daughter, after all."⁶

Ouyang Zi's concern with technical mastery, as revealed in her literary criticism and the frequent reworking of her early fiction, might also indicate a degree of potentially inhibitory perfectionism. She began work on a novel, *A Bizarre Legal Case* in 1988, but abandoned it in 1990. The sum total of Ouyang Zi's published fiction thus consists of the sixteen short stories first written between 1960 and 1970 and rewritten in the 1970s, plus two autobiographical pieces from 1977 and 1987 which are included in her 1993 edition of collected fiction, perhaps as a demonstration of her continuing commitment to literary production.

Ouyang Zi and her fellow students were strongly influenced by T A Hsia's criticism of the romantic and sentimental tendency of May Fourth writing.⁷ In the introduction to her first volume of collected work, Ouyang Zi states that her early attempts at writing fiction were immature and sentimental and she had therefore chosen not to publish them, with the exception of one story which she characterises as lacking in depth and tainted by sentimentalism, "that common ailment of Chinese writers."⁸ The story does stand apart: "Xiaonan's Diary" 小南的日記⁹ reads more like a Nativist tale about a Taiwanese childhood than the Modernist fiction with which Ouyang Zi's work was to become identified. The first-person diary entries of the eponymous narrator show a young schoolboy who consistently fails to gain the approbation he seeks from his mother, and who feels a failure in the role of elder brother to his competent and worldly-wise little sister. Xiaonan's failure to observe social rules and taboos earn him opprobrium: he asks naive questions

⁶ Ouyang Zi, "Yi jian wangshi ji lian xiang" 一件往事及聯想 (A past incident and its associations), first published in the *China Times*, 21 April 1982, collected in *Shengming de guiji* 生命的軌跡 (The track of life) (Taipei: Jiuge chubanshe, 1988), 27-34. In her introduction to this collection of essays and memoirs Ouyang Zi notes that her personal essays often read like short fiction. Two autobiographical pieces, crafted with the explicit intention of creating a story-like plot, are included in her 1982 and 1993 collections of fiction.

⁷ See "A transplanted Oriental cherry" in *Yizhi de yinghua - Ouyang Zi sanwenji* 移植的櫻花 - 歐陽子散文集 (A transplanted Oriental cherry - Collected Prose by Ouyang Zi) (Taipei: Erya chubanshe, 1978), 157-158.

⁸ Introduction to *The Girl with Long Hair*, 1.

⁹ Ouyang Zi, "Xiaonan de riji" 小南的日記 (Xiaonan's Diary), first published in *Lianhe bao*, 14-15 February, 1962. Collected in *The Girl with Long Hair*, 1-20 and *Stories by Ouyang Zi*, 75-94.

which reveal that he has unwittingly visited a brothel, and he is berated for associating with low-class people when he attends the funeral procession of the father of a classmate. (His classmate is subsequently obliged to leave school to assist her mother as a street peddler of *doufu*.) The child narrator acts as an innocent but acute observer of sibling rivalry and of contemporary social realities: poverty, prostitution, social stratification and class snobbery.¹⁰

Taiwan is the specific setting of all but three of Ouyang Zi's stories, but description of the social background plays a marginal role in the rest of her narratives. The narratives are focused on the inner world of her characters' minds rather than descriptions of the external world, structured to a large extent according to the Aristotelian unities and the scenic method of Henry James, employing a narrative style characterised by objectivity and psychological realism.¹¹

The majority of the stories are structured around a moment of acute psychological crisis, often precipitated by a single event which exposes the insurmountable gulf between the protagonist's inner and outer worlds: a rupture between self-image and social persona. Most are narrated in the third person, restricted to the perspective of the main protagonist, but that perspective is undermined by the text to reveal the limited and sometimes pathologically warped psychology of the narrator.¹² Below, the stories are considered in three categories, according to the narrative persona employed: young women, adult women, and adult men.

2.1.1 Girls on the edge . . .

Seven of Ouyang Zi's sixteen stories are narrated from the perspective of female university students. The young woman's own story is central to the narrative in six of the seven, and in all of these the protagonist cuts herself off from a relationship or potential relationship with a partner of the opposite sex.

The narrator of "Half a Smile" 半個微笑¹³ is lying in a hospital bed. She had stepped backwards off a cliff to escape the humiliation she felt after having eagerly returned

¹⁰ The use of a child's perspective might reflect the influence of Henry James and Katherine Mansfield, but was also a common nativist practice, to avoid censorship for writing anti-government criticism. It was also a device used by a number of writers of the May Fourth period: see Bonnie S McDougall, and Kam Louie, *The Literature of China in the Twentieth Century*. (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1997), 148.

¹¹ Introduction to Ouyang Zi, *The Girl with Long Hair*, 1-3.

¹² Ouyang Zi demonstrates mastery of the narrative technique best exemplified by Henry James' *What Maisie Knew*. Mieke Bal argues that the term 'narrator' should be replaced by 'focalizer' in such cases, in order to distinguish between the perceptions of the 'character-bound focalizer' and the selectively omniscient narrative agent which provides the reader with a wider perspective. In Ouyang Zi's fiction this effect is most often achieved through the behaviour and dialogue of other characters. See Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the theory of narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 142-148.

¹³ Ouyang Zi, "Ban ge wei xiao" 半個微笑 (Half a Smile), *Autumn Leaves* 7-22. First published in *Modern*

the sudden embrace of a fellow student: he was only trying to save her from falling. Wang Qi has long been attracted to the boy, but has felt trapped in the role of the “model student”. Believing that her momentary act of passion has transformed her identity as well as her image among her classmates, a transformation she has longed for but which now feels as false as her former image, she finds herself in a crisis.

The debilitating fear of relinquishing the social role of “model student” to take on the vulnerability of negotiating a relationship is also the theme of “Wooden Beauty” 木美人¹⁴. Ding Luo, the first person narrator, addresses the reader directly in a breathless, engaging style. Enjoying the novelty and excitement of a first date with a boy who she has secretly liked since first meeting him, she discovers at the entrance to the cinema that he had initially invited her out in response to a dare. She abandons him immediately and resolves to remain unapproachable henceforth.

In “The Test” 考驗,¹⁵ set in the United States, there are some social pressures on the protagonist which problematise a mixed-race relationship with an American, but it is Meilian’s exacerbation of these tensions that cause her finally to break down and conclude that a relationship is impossible, in spite of mutual protestations of love. The two versions of the story are significantly different: the original 1964 version, entitled “Dating” 約會, features a clearly self-deceiving protagonist whose problems reflect adolescent psychological conflicts regarding dating and relationships as much as the specific difficulties of a cross-cultural relationship. The 1980 version cuts much of the text which highlights the immaturity and limited perspective of the protagonist and elaborates the parts referring to cultural differences, resulting in a rather different tone. Meilian, significantly more self-aware, becomes a much more reliable commentator on the potential barriers to a cross-cultural relationship.¹⁶

Unlike the self-alienating, self-negating protagonists of “Half a Smile”, “Wooden Beauty” and “Dating”, the decision of the nineteen-year-old protagonist of “The Wall” 牆¹⁷ to end a potential relationship is based on an increased self-awareness which leads her to question the motivations behind her attraction to the taboo object of her affections: her brother-in-law, who is over twice her age. Ruolan questions his motivations, her own

Literature Vol. 2, May 1960, 71-80.

¹⁴ Ouyang Zi, “Mu mei ren” 木美人 (Wooden Beauty), *Autumn Leaves* 67-72. First published in *Modern Literature* Vol. 10, September 1961, 43-45.

¹⁵ Ouyang Zi, “Kaoyan” 考驗 (The Test), *Autumn Leaves* 89-104. First published as “Yue hui” 約會 (Dating) in *Modern Literature* Vol. 21, 1964, 1-13. Significantly revised and retitled 1970, minor revisions 1980.

¹⁶ The different versions will be discussed separately, in Chapters 3 and 5.

¹⁷ Ouyang Zi, “Qiang” 牆 (The Wall), *Autumn Leaves* 23-38. First published in *Modern Literature* Vol. 4, December 1960, 79-89.

feelings, and the mutability of emotions in general, and decides to cut off the connection.

The protagonist of “Cousin Suzhen” 素珍表姐¹⁸, Lihui, constantly outshone by her eponymous cousin, has just begun to date Suzhen’s ex-boyfriend. She thinks she may be genuinely in love, but all her desire for the boy disappears when she discovers that she has not stolen the boy’s affection from her cousin. She had been deceiving herself: the desire she thought she had been experiencing was in fact the excitement of competition, and when the basis of this victory is undermined she has no further interest in the boy.

“Meirong” 美容¹⁹ is Ouyang Zi’s only story in which the protagonist does not experience a debilitating psychological crisis. The eponymous narrator shares with Ouyang Zi’s other characters a gulf between her social exterior and internal psychology, but there is no conflict between Meirong’s inner and outer worlds. The outwardly perfect, inwardly self-satisfied and self-serving young woman is making plans for her postgraduate studies in the United States. This involves finding a socially acceptable means of breaking with her current boyfriend, taking up with a new boy who will accompany her to the States, and ensuring she doesn’t make any definite commitments, because: “who could say that America might not be full of smart handsome *gentlemen* [English in the original], all tall and with PhDs.”(149)

“Woman Possessed” 魔女²⁰ is narrated by the daughter of the mother of the title, and in this case it is the revelation of the discrepancy between the appearance and the reality of the protagonist’s “perfect mother”²¹ which precipitates a crisis of identity in the narrator. Qianju had felt let down by her recently widowed mother’s quick remarriage and finds her mother’s abasement before her new stepfather inexplicable. She is plunged into a much deeper crisis when she finds that her mother’s harmonious marriage had masked a complete indifference to her family: she had lived only for this man, her lover, since her university days, and would have abandoned her family immediately if he had ever agreed to commit to her. Her outward perfection as a loyal wife and good mother had masked long-term infidelity: Qianju’s paternity itself is in question.

¹⁸ Ouyang Zi, “Suzhen biaojie” 素珍表姐 (Cousin Suzhen), *Autumn Leaves*, 183-200. First published in *Modern Literature* Vol. 36, January 1969, 4-15.

¹⁹ Ouyang Zi, “Meirong” 美容 (Meirong). *Autumn Leaves*, 137-149. First published in *Modern Literature* Vol. 29, 1966, 153-162.

²⁰ Ouyang Zi, “Mo nü” 魔女 (Woman Possessed). *Autumn Leaves*, 165-182. First published in *Modern Literature* Vol. 33, December 1967, 218-228. Translated by the author in Wai-lim Yip and William Tay eds., *Chinese Women Writers Today* (University of Maryland, 1979).

²¹ The story has also been translated under the English title “Perfect Mother.” See Bibliography: Primary texts.

2.1.2 Women on the verge. . .

Five stories feature psychological aberrance and/or moments of crisis in the lives of older, married women. Paralleling in some ways the masochistic submission of the mother to her unworthy lover in “Woman Possessed,” the protagonist of “The Net” 網,²² Yu Wenqin, believes herself genuinely happy in the complete surrender of her individual will and identity in marriage. She only begins to question her voluntary subjection to her husband following a coincidental meeting with an old friend, Tang, who reveals that her husband had intercepted a letter from him and replied in Wenqin’s name, declining Tang’s invitation to meet. Wenqin describes Tang as a soulmate, but someone she had always felt was incompatible as a marriage partner: they were too equal, too alike. Her dormant will awakened by the chance meeting, however, Wenqin challenges her husband about the letter, even suggesting that they might separate for a few days. Her husband reacts with cold anger; Wenqin breaks down in abject surrender, begging for forgiveness and entreating her husband not to leave her.

The protagonists of “The Awakening” 覺醒²³ and “Approaching Dusk” 近黃昏時 are mothers with an abnormal relationship to their college-age sons. Dunzhi, protagonist of “The Awakening”, is convinced that her son is hiding from her evidence of a relationship with one of his classmates, a girl whom Dunzhi has strongly taken against and who she feels is stealing her son from her. Dunzhi has been excessively attached to her son since he was a young child, having transferred all her affections to him after discovering her husband in the act of adultery. She had never enjoyed good relations with her husband again, but had dutifully nursed him through illness and his death from cancer. Confronting her son with this perceived betrayal of her, Dunzhi discovers that the girl had in fact rejected her son: his recent silence and withdrawal is due to disappointment in love, not to any perception on his behalf of a conflict of loyalties. This realisation brings about a transformation in Dunzhi. Released from her pathological jealousy, she returns to loving her son like any other mother. Her awakening is accompanied by a strong sense of loss. Wishing that her husband were still with her to comfort her, she suddenly realises that she has finally completely forgiven him his adultery.

²² Ouyang Zi, “Wang” 網 (The Net). *Autumn Leaves*, 39-52. First published in *Modern Literature* Vol. 6, January 1961, 75-81.

²³ Ouyang Zi, “Juexing” 覺醒 (Awakening). *Autumn Leaves*, 73-88. First published as “Shui bian” 蛻變 (Metamorphosis) in *Modern Literature* Vol. 12, January 1962, 52-60, then as “Na chang toufa de nühai” 那長頭髮的女孩 (The girl with long hair) in *The girl with long hair*, 1967, 88-102.

"Approaching Dusk,"²⁴ divided into three first person monologues, is the most experimental of Ouyang Zi's stories in terms of form and style and the most unconventional in subject matter.²⁵ The mother, Lifen, her alienated son, Jiwei, and their domestic servant, Nanny Wang, each present a different perspective on the same incident: Jiwei watches his friend, his mother's lover, leaving the family house, runs after him and attempts to kill or at least castrate him. Through the partial information provided by each of three characters the reader is presented with an Oedipal relationship between mother and son, enacted through Lifen's sexual liaisons with a series of young men of her son's age. Lifen's husband is twenty years older than she, and often absent. Her monologue is punctuated with a repeated refrain: "Lifen has no son, Lifen has no husband, Lifen is all alone." Her disturbed psychology is attributed to the death of her eldest son as a child, who was beautiful and resembled his mother, whereas Jiwei resembled his father, whom she calls a murderer, blaming him for the accident in which her first son was killed. While Lifen attempts to connect with her dead son through her affairs with young men, her living son attempts to reach her through the same: a homosexual relationship between Jiwei and the young man is indicated, the friend thus embodying Jiwei even more closely in his vicarious relationship with his mother. Whereas Nanny Wang interprets Jiwei's attack on the young man as defence of his father's honour, it is in fact prompted by Jiwei's realisation that the young man is abandoning both his mother and himself.

"Mrs. Bay's early morning" 貝太太的早春²⁶, Ouyang Zi's only story populated entirely by non-Chinese characters, is a stream-of-consciousness narrative reflecting the thoughts and dialogue of the eponymous narrator. An embittered middle-aged American woman married to a successful artist and university professor who is away on sabbatical in Britain, Mrs Bay has taken in a confident and attractive student lodger, Jane. Jane's fiancé writes to her daily, but Mrs Bay has begun intercepting and hiding these letters. According to her twisted logic, she is helping Jane by teaching her to accept disappointment and not to expect too much from men. She reflects on her own experience: her husband used to be as loving as Jane's fiancé when they were young and poor, and he too had protested his need of her. Once he had become successful, however, and after Mrs Bay had given birth to their first child, he lost interest in her. She is certain her husband regularly has affairs and

²⁴ Ouyang Zi, "Jin huanghun shi" 近黄昏時 (Approaching Dusk). *Autumn Leaves*, 121-136. First published in *Modern Literature* Vol. 26, 1965, 76-87.

²⁵ Yvonne Chang notes the "usual candour" of Ouyang Zi in admitting that the story was written just after she had completed a term paper on Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*. Chang, *Modernism and the Nativist Resistance*, 42.

²⁶ Ouyang Zi, "Bei taitai de zaochun" 貝太太的早春 (Mrs. Bei's early morning). *The girl with long hair*, 1967, 103-109. First published in *Modern Literature* Vol. 19, January 1964, 64-68.

believes that he would have divorced her if he was not so concerned with keeping up appearances.

“Autumn Leaves” 秋葉²⁷ is the longest of Ouyang Zi’s stories, produced at the end of her fiction-writing career when she was no longer as concerned with the technical criteria she had laid down in her earlier work: it is not limited to the three unities and extends beyond the restricted vision of the main protagonist.²⁸ Yifen, a thirty-year-old widow from Taiwan, has moved to the United States to marry a much older Chinese divorcee. Her husband’s half-American son, Minsheng, is only nine years younger than her. Minsheng’s father represents an emotionally distant, mildly oppressive figure for both of them. Minsheng perceives a conflict between his Chinese and American identities. Although he has been shaped by his father, his American mother represents for him the emotional side of his own personality, repressed by his Chinese superego. The two exchange confidences which inspire a bonding and mutual attraction which proves physical as well as spiritual. Yifen tears herself away from Minsheng before their sexual relationship is consummated, reasserting social values over her own desires, but Minsheng feels that the act finally identifies his passionate, Western side as his true self.

2.1.3 Men in crisis

Three of Ouyang Zi’s stories feature male protagonists. The protagonist of “The Vase” 花瓶,²⁹ Shi Zhichuan, is in some senses a counterpart to the wife in “The Net”: unable to conceive of a marital relationship that is other than hierarchical. He is obsessively jealous of his wife and feels her independence and self-assurance a threat to his masculinity. Desperate to dominate her, Shi confronts his wife with a situation he thinks will crush her: knowing that she has made a date with her cousin that evening, he feigns ignorance and tells her that he plans to take her to the cinema, covertly challenging her to refuse. To his great surprise his wife turns the tables on him, confronting him with full comprehension of his tactics and deriding him for his cowardice and jealousy. Shi’s actions having served only to confirm his wife’s superiority and expose his abjection before her, he drives her from the house and collapses in despair.

²⁷ Ouyang Zi, “Qiu ye” 秋葉 (Autumn Leaves). *Autumn Leaves*, 201-230. First published in *Modern Literature* Vol. 38, July 1969, 59-83.

²⁸ Ouyang Zi, Ouyang Zi discusses this development in the postscript to her 1980 edition of *Autumn Leaves*, 231. The narrative of “Autumn Leaves” takes place over two days, involving a number of distinct scenes.

²⁹ Ouyang Zi, “Huaping” 花瓶 (The Vase). First published in the Hong Kong magazine *Zhongwai* (Sinowest Pictorial), May 1961. *Autumn Leaves*, 53-66.

The psychological state of the protagonist of “Prodigal Father” 浪子³⁰ is much the same. In agreeing to marry him, Hongming’s wife had married below her social station and against her parents’ wishes, and he now feels inadequate and resentful. He is convinced that his wife looks down on him for not being able to provide for her properly. Feeling that she flaunts her affection for their son as a form of revenge on him, he has long withdrawn from both of them emotionally. As in “The Vase”, he engineers the power game in which he believes he will triumph over his wife: he secretly encourages his son’s relationship with a girl of bad reputation, to whom his wife is implacably opposed. Hongming believes that severing his wife’s closeness to her son will break her independent spirit and restore harmonious relations between husband and wife. When a confrontation between mother and son does take place and she lies on her bed, prostrate with despair, Hongming feels the distance between himself and his wife dissolve. Full of love and rekindled desire, he speaks to her of mutual comfort and support. His illusions, however, are shattered: his wife tells him that his lack of support on this occasion has finally obliterated all hope she had still harboured that he would one day show he cared for her and for their son. She asks him to leave.

“The Last Class” 最後一節課³¹ is told from the perspective of a schoolteacher who has never had any relations with women since being humiliated at the hands of a classmate in whom he was romantically interested as a schoolboy. Now almost forty, and a well-respected teacher, Li keeps concealed his prejudice toward introverted boys and his dislike of carefree girls. He has developed a particularly obsessive attachment to a male pupil who reminds him of himself as a child. In a terrible reversal Li becomes the agent of this boy’s humiliation in the classroom through projecting onto him his own past experience of rejection. Li knows that Yang Qian has become enamoured of a particular classmate. When she innocently asks how to spell ‘ugly toad’ in class he accuses her of mocking Yang Qian. It is therefore Li who makes public his pupil’s secret affection, exposing Yang Qian to classroom ridicule and destroying in the process his own reputation. The extent of Li’s mistake is driven home by his final glimpse of the girl remaining behind after class to comfort Yang Qian, highlighting his own isolation.

³⁰ Ouyang Zi, “Lang zi” 浪子 (Prodigal Father). *Autumn Leaves*, 105-120. First published in *Modern Literature* Vol. 20, March 1964, 35-45.

³¹ Ouyang Zi, “Zuihou yijie ke” 最後一節課 (The Last class). *Autumn Leaves*, 151-164. First published in *Modern Literature* Vol. 31, April 1967, 108-118.

2.1.4 Autobiography as fiction

Ouyang Zi's collections of personal essays include portraits of her family members, descriptions of personal events and discussions of America and cultural identity. Some of these utilise the techniques of her earlier short stories: she chose to include two 'story-like' pieces in her 1993 collection of short fiction as representative of her later writing. The two pieces, narrated in the first person by Mrs Yan (Ouyang Zi's married name), will therefore also be considered briefly here. "A Weekend Afternoon" 周末午後³² is structured around an incident in which the narrator's five-year old daughter is charged with having thrown a stone at a passing car while playing with a neighbouring nine-year old American boy. No damage is done, although the elderly woman driver of the car initially demands compensation. The narrator eventually secures a confession from the boy that it was he who had thrown the stone, not her daughter. She comments that the child is neglected by his parents, who both work full time, but that they do punish the boy if he transgresses their strict code of behaviour. Mrs Yan's non-confrontational tactics secure both the retraction of his lie and his gratitude towards her for not involving his parents.

"Dodgy Dealings" 詭道³³ likewise shows Mrs Yan prevailing over the less-than-honest contractors she employs to convert her patio into a fitness room: the piece opens with her noting that she has learnt a lot, not only about construction, but about people and society. She is shown a very limited range of options for the flooring of the new annexe and subsequently discovers that this was a tactic to pass off bargain end-of-range stock on unsuspecting customers. The narrator had selected the contractor because he was a neighbour, and had imagined establishing friendly relations: early on she had sent him home with delicious frozen spring rolls for his family to enjoy. It is this discrepancy between her own feelings of warmth towards him and his dishonesty that grieves her most. The story unfolds as she learns more about how the scam operates and manages to secure herself a free replacement floor (without the involvement of her husband) as well as 'straighten out' the main contractor without having to report him to a higher authority. While the self-praise of these stories is rather transparent, some readers may respond positively to the indication of successful cultural adjustment in a foreign country.

³² Ouyang Zi, "Zhoumo wuhou" 周末午後 (A Weekend Afternoon). First published *Lianhe bao* 21 April 1977. *Ouyang Zi ji*. 歐陽子集 (Selected works by Ouyang Zi), Taipei: Qianwei, 1993, 203-214.

³³ Ouyang Zi, "Guidao" 詭道 (Dodgy Dealings), *Ouyang Xi ji*. 歐陽子集 (Selected works by Ouyang Zi) (Taipei: Qianwei, 1993), 215-249. First published *Lianhebao*, August 1987.

2.1.5 Critical reception

Ouyang Zi was one of the first victims of the vituperative attacks on Modernist writers which heralded the beginning of the Nativist literary movement. The debate on her work began with a newspaper review of *Autumn Leaf* in early 1972 and ran in various newspaper columns and literary magazines until the end of 1973, with the publication of four highly critical pieces in the first volume of the nativist literary journal *Literary Quarterly*.³⁴ Echoing May Fourth debates about the relative merits of ‘art for art’s sake’ and ‘art for society’, she and other modernists were charged with worshipping the West and neglecting social responsibilities. Ouyang Zi was attacked for failing to subscribe to the traditional Chinese view of literature as a tool to uphold ideal moral values. She was accused of “looking down on Chinese culture, protesting virtuous ideas, planting evil ideas, advocating individualism and the breakdown of the Chinese family.”³⁵ Her modernist supporters discussed the importance of the aesthetic and technical functions of literature and defended Ouyang Zi against superficial and inaccurate readings of her stories, which often missed all traces of irony and cited the stunted sensibility of her characters as examples of the author’s moral deficiency.³⁶ Ouyang Zi did not respond to the debate herself, preferring to defend her understanding of the purpose and functions of literature much later, in her detailed critical reading of Bai Xianyang’s work.³⁷

The heated literary debate aside, Ouyang Zi was recognised early on as having made a significant contribution to the development of modern Chinese fiction. She has remained an important figure in the modernist canon despite her restricted output, and her work is still in print.³⁸ Six anthologies of Taiwan fiction translated into English between 1961 and 1990 feature her work.³⁹ Bai Xianyang noted two respects in which her work possesses special qualities rare in traditional Chinese fiction: her command of the classical aesthetic form, and

³⁴ Tang Jisong “Ouyang Zi de Qiuye”, *Zhonghua ribao*, May 17-19, 1972. *Wenji* (Literary Quarterly) Vol. 1, August 1973. See *Ouyang Zi ji*. 歐陽子集 (Selected works by Ouyang Zi), Taipei: Qianwei, 1993, 303-306 for a full list of critical essays on Ouyang Zi’s work.

³⁵ See Sally Ann Lindfors “Private lives: An Analysis of the Short Stories of Ouyang Tzu, a Modern Chinese Writer.” (PhD dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1983), 269-274, and for a more general outline of the debate, Chang, *Modernism and the Nativist Resistance*, 149-153.

³⁶ Ouyang Zi’s explicit instruction in the introduction to her first collection that readers should not interpret the perceptions of her characters as the author’s own proved to be a pertinent, if ignored, injunction. Ouyang Zi. *The girl with long hair*, 3.

³⁷ Ouyang Zi. *Wang Xie tang qian de yanzi: Taibei ren de yanxi yu suoyin* 王謝堂前的燕子：臺北人的研析與索隱 (Swallows in front of the noble mansions of Wang and Hsieh: An analysis of *Tales of Taipei Characters*) (Taipei: Erya chubanshe, 1976).

³⁸ She is perhaps best known for her role as editor of a two-volume collection of selected stories from *Modern Literature*, which is widely available: Ouyang Zi ed., *Xiandai wenxue xiaoshuo xuanji* 現代文學小說選集 (Selected Fiction from *Modern Literature*) Two volumes. (Taipei: Erya, 1977).

³⁹ This is a high rate of inclusion: the number of anthologies of Taiwan fiction in English is probably not more than fifteen or so. See Primary Appendix for full details.

her mature, precise psychological analysis.⁴⁰ The general assessment of Ouyang Zi's oeuvre is that she is primarily a writer of psychological fiction. Chi Pang-yuan writes that her characters have "no obvious physical existence. They are only embodiments of certain psychic forces ruthlessly pushing forward in the search for love and identity and ending in shattered illusions."⁴¹ Joseph S M Lau describes Ouyang Zi's gift for describing "thwarted passions and ungovernable irrationality" and states that "[a]lthough she is often assailed by didactic critics for her nonchalance toward social or political causes, the value of her art asserts itself by baring the truth about the limit of reason, by charting the psychic forces that paralyze the mind and the will."⁴² Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang cites Ouyang Zi as the best example of the new narrative form introduced by the Taiwan's Modernists⁴³ and finds her "an important example of her generation's command of form and rejection of sentimentalism. . . [displaying] a persistent concern [with] the boundary between normal and abnormal behaviour. . . [which] clearly shows the influence of Enlightenment rationality and the modern science of psychology on her work."⁴⁴ The most detailed exposition of Ouyang Zi's fiction is a doctoral dissertation in English, which discusses the work in terms of its literary techniques and points to the recurrent themes of personal and social identity.⁴⁵

Gender and national issues are not generally a feature of any descriptions of Ouyang Zi's work: she does not set out to explore the social milieu of her characters, nor do those characters reflect general types. Nonetheless, in spite of her depictions of extreme situations and personality types, Ouyang Zi does rely on certain parameters that shape the social and psychological world of her characters. As she makes explicit: "That he [sic] reacts in a certain manner, makes a certain choice, has a definite reason, and this reason can be traced back to or inferred from his environment, his past, or his personality."⁴⁶ This thesis, in undertaking a feminist reading of the fiction, will, for the first time, seek to trace back and infer the ways in which Ouyang Zi's exploration of the nexus between self-perception and social role is shaped by gender discourses, an important but overlooked aspect of her work.

⁴⁰ Bai Xianrong, Introduction to Ouyang Zi, *Autumn Leaves*, 1.

⁴¹ Chi Pang-yuan et al. eds., *An Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Literature Vol II* (Taipei: National Institute for Compilation and Translation, 1975), 343.

⁴² Introduction to translation of "The Net". Joseph Shiu-ming Lau ed., *The Unbroken Chain: An Anthology of Taiwan Fiction since 1926* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1983), 185.

⁴³ Chang, *Modernism and the Nativist Resistance*, 38-47.

⁴⁴ Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang in Ann C Carver and Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang eds. *Bamboo Shoots after the Rain: Contemporary Short Stories by Women Writers of Taiwan* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1990), 103 and xx-xxi.

⁴⁵ Sally Ann Lindfors "Private lives: An Analysis of the Short Stories of Ouyang Tzu, a Modern Chinese Writer." (PhD dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1983).

⁴⁶ Ouyang Zi, *The girl with long hair*, 2.

It will also seek to read Ouyang Zi's psychological fiction as national allegory: an approach which has not been attempted by any of her critics to date.

2.2 Chen Ruoxi: Life and Work

Chen Ruoxi 陳若曦 was born Chen Xiumei 陳秀美 in 1938, the second of five children born into the family of a carpenter in Zhonghe, just outside Taipei city. As a Taiwanese native of humble origins she was a minority among the mainlander-dominated intellectual community of National Taiwan University, supporting herself through scholarships and part-time tutoring. Graduating from the Foreign Languages and Literatures department in 1961, she studied creative writing and English literature in the United States from 1962 to 1966, first at Mount Holyoke College, followed by a brief spell on the creative writing course at Iowa University, and then at Johns Hopkins University. During this time she met and married Duan Shiyao, a Mainlander, and in 1966 the couple moved to the People's Republic of China in a patriotic desire to aid in the development of the motherland. After experiencing seven years of the Cultural Revolution they left, spending a year in Hong Kong and then moving to Canada with their two children. Chen accepted a position at the University of California, Berkeley in 1979 and the family became permanent residents in the United States. Chen finally returned to Taiwan alone in 1995, where she is active in environmental work as member of the reformist Human Realm Buddhist movement (人間佛教 *renjian fojiao*).

Chen Ruoxi's first attempts at fiction writing were undertaken as homework for her Chinese literature class at National Taiwan University, put forward by her teacher for publication in T A Hsia's *Literary Review* in 1958. She was a founding member and editor of *Modern Literature*, publishing five pieces in that forum between 1960 and 1962 as well as making contributions to newspapers and journals.¹ Chen Ruoxi is best known for her Cultural Revolution stories, both in the Chinese speaking world and abroad. Initially serialised in Hong Kong and Taiwan newspapers in the 1970s, they have been through numerous print-runs and translated into eight languages. Chen's subsequent literary output reflects the lives of overseas Chinese in the United States, revolving around the relationships between Chinese individuals and the several Chinese homelands: Taiwan, Hong Kong and the People's Republic. Her work has been published in all three places, initially in newspapers and literary magazines, followed by publication in book form.

Between 1960 and 2000 Chen Ruoxi published five novels, fourteen collections of short stories and fourteen collections of essays. This thesis considers all the fiction published in Taiwan in that period, excluding only work written since her return to the

¹ See Appendix 1 for a list of the stories as they appeared in *Modern Literature*.

island in 1995: five novels and nine collections of short fiction, comprising a total of 69 short stories.² The summary below is divided into four roughly chronological periods which reflect Chen's own movements: early fiction set in Taiwan, fiction set in the People's Republic of China (primarily during the Cultural Revolution), fiction set in the United States, and finally fiction encompassing the whole transnational Chinese community, involving characters who move between Taiwan, Hong Kong, the People's Republic, the United States, Canada and Australia.

2.2.1 Taiwanese Nativism

Thirteen of Chen's early stories were published in book form in Taiwan: her own translation into English of five early stories under the name Lucy Chen in *Spirit Calling: Five Stories of Taiwan* in 1962, and two collections in the original Chinese published in 1976 and 1993.³ Chen states that while some of her very early fiction was imaginative and experimental, influenced by her reading of European and American literature, the task of editing *Modern Literature* had spurred her into serious consideration about what to write. She decided that she wished to depict the lives of the rural Taiwanese with whom she was familiar.⁴

The stories which Chen describes as more experimental are "Uncle Qinzhi" 欽之舅舅 and "Bali's Journey" 巴里的路程.⁵ The former is a mysterious, gothic tale narrated by a young girl whose eccentric uncle practises esoteric chanting and has premonitions. The point of her story is that "we can't deny that there are some things that science is unable to explain." (2) "Bali's Journey" is a surreal tale typical of the modernist prose slated by the Nativist critics: in colourful, impressionistic language it describes a man walking through bustling streets with shops crammed with bizarre goods, passing by a philosophical debate being held under a Bodhi tree, rejecting all received wisdom and continuing his journey in search of meaning. The story can be interpreted as a reflection of the confusion and disruption of a population confronting new ideas and material goods in the rapidly modernising environment of 1960s Taiwan.

² As Chen's Cultural Revolution fiction is well known and readily available in English, detailed story summaries will not be provided here.

³ Chen Ruoxi, *Spirit Calling: Five Stories of Taiwan*, (Taipei: The Heritage Press, 1962), hereafter cited as *Spirit Calling*; *Chen Ruoxi zixuan ji* 陳若曦自選集 (Stories by Chen Ruoxi selected by the author) (Taipei: Lianjing chuban gongsi, 1976); *Chen Ruoxi ji* 陳若曦集 (Selected works by Chen Ruoxi) (Taipei: Qianwei, 1993).

⁴ Chen Ruoxi, afterword to *Chen Ruoxi zixuan ji*, 194.

⁵ "Qinzhi jiujiu" 欽之舅舅 (Uncle Qinzhi), in *Chen Ruoxi zixuan ji*, 1-38; "Bali de lucheng" 巴里的路程 (Bali's Journey), in *Chen Ruoxi zixuan ji*, 59-68.

The “Grey-Eyed Black Cat” 灰眼黑貓⁶ is a more realistic but still somewhat fanciful tale in which a girl is driven to madness and suicide by an unhappy arranged marriage: her drunken father had offered her hand in marriage as gambling stake, losing to a notoriously unpleasant family. The girl’s miserable fate is interpreted by herself and the rural community as a curse caused by a cat, but the young first person female narrator explicitly rejects superstition, condemning instead the oppressive patriarchal tradition.⁷

The remainder of Chen’s early stories depict more quotidian life in rural Taiwan. While there is portrayal of the tensions between old and new, old traditions are not explicitly condemned and there is an ambivalence about superstition. The narrator of “Spirit Calling” 收魂⁸ is a young girl whose educated parents turn in desperation to a traditional Daoist medium in order to save the life of their son who is about to undergo a serious operation for a life-threatening condition. The narrator’s father, a medical doctor, is initially embarrassed, but by the end of the ceremony he is participating fully with renewed hope. In the end, neither science nor religion is of any help: the girl’s brother is revealed to have died in emergency surgery during the “spirit calling” ritual. In “Peach Blossom” 夫人桃花⁹ a medium is sought by the protagonist’s husband in a last resort to save his ailing wife. The source of her illness is identified as the unhappy spirit of the young man to whom she had originally been promised in marriage and who had committed suicide when she rejected him, leaving him with no descendants to worship his ghost. To placate the spirit Peach Blossom’s husband declares that he will give all the children of his marriage the dead man’s surname.¹⁰ His wife awakes and is cured.

Rural people maintaining their values is a feature of several stories. “Miner’s Wife”¹¹ is narrated from the perspective of the assistant foreman of the coal mine in which the miner has drowned. The miner’s wife turns down increasing offers of compensation and insists on the recovery of the body for burial. She is alternately supported and vilified by the local community, according to their interpretation of how her stance might affect their livelihoods: economic considerations supersede the traditional imperative to recover and

⁶ Chen Ruoxi, “Hui yan hei mao” 灰眼黑貓 (Grey-Eyed Black Cat), in *Chen Ruoxi zixuan ji*, 39-58.

⁷ The story has parallels with Lu Xun’s “New Year’s Sacrifice” and nativist Taiwanese writer Lü Heruo’s 1942 story “Riches, Sons and Long Life”, translated by Rosemary Haddon in *Oxcart: Nativist Stories from Taiwan 1934-1977* (Dortmund: Projekt-Verlag, 1996); female misery attributed to fate or superstition, but exposed by the text as the effect of the traditional patriarchal system.

⁸ Chen Ruoxi, “Spirit Calling,” in *Spirit Calling*, 73-87. Also published as “Shou hun” 收魂 (Spirit Calling), in *Chen Ruoxi zixuan ji*, 69-82.

⁹ Chen Ruoxi, “Furen Taohua” 夫人桃花 (Peach Blossom), in *Chen Ruoxi zixuan ji*, 129-138.

¹⁰ Peach Blossom had been adopted into the family of her intended as a child, in a traditional custom which often led to adultery, as documented by Margery Wolf: “Girls who marry their brothers,” in Margery Wolf, *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1972).

¹¹ Chen Ruoxi, “Miner’s Wife,” in *Spirit Calling*, 39-72. This story has not been published in Chinese.

decently bury the dead. The narrator feels the woman displays admirable strength and dignity. The narrative perspective of “One hundred yuan” 百元¹² is likewise that of an outside male observer: the assistant to a professor investigating a rural epidemic. The grinding poverty affecting the village they have been conducting research in touches both of them, and they plan to take one young woman with them to escape to a better life in the city. The village has a taboo against members leaving, but her parents are willing although they will be desolate without her. As a gesture of compassion, the professor distributes his research funds among the villagers the night before he leaves. Overcome by this generosity, the villagers unexpectedly turn out en masse to see him off, weeping and thanking him on their knees. The narrator is sickened by the grotesque power of money to elicit this humiliating response, but its effect is to subvert another type of exploitation: the villagers’ presence makes it impossible for the young girl to leave the village to face the uncertainties of the supposedly better life in the city.

The pernicious effect of poverty on individuals and families, particularly on women, is a frequent theme of Chen’s early work. “A Morning for Chao-ti”¹³ depicts a young woman who has worked in her parents’ humble street-restaurant since primary school. Her name means ‘brother-beckoner’ (*zhaodi* 招弟), a common appellation for girls which highlights the importance of male heirs in traditional society. Chao-ti is resigned to her fate, serving her family at the expense of any personal fulfilment such as marriage: her father drinks, her mother is crippled with arthritis, and her three younger brothers look to her for material support. The protagonist of “Last Performance” 最後夜戲¹⁴ is a single mother addicted to heroin. Her career as a local opera singer is jeopardised both by the decline in popularity of local opera and the fact that the manager has told her she cannot keep her baby son if she wants to remain in the troupe. As the only future for a retired singer is to marry a businessman or open a teahouse or brothel, the protagonist chooses to leave her child in order to continue her singing career. In “Ah-Chuang of Heaven-Blessed Village” 辛莊¹⁵ the eponymous rural protagonist has been working two jobs, day and night, to support his family of three children. Having neglected his wife, he discovers that she has been seeking solace elsewhere: his friends hint that she has been having an affair with their lodger.

¹² Chen Ruoxi, “Bai yuan” 百元 (One hundred yuan), in *Chen Ruoxi ji*, 37-43. First published in *Lianhebao* (United Daily News), 19 December 1961.

¹³ Chen Ruoxi, “A Morning for Chao-ti,” in *Spirit Calling*, 3-10. This story has not been published in Chinese.

¹⁴ Chen Ruoxi, “Zuihou yexi” 最後夜戲 (Last Performance), in *Chen Ruoxi zixuan ji*, 117-128.

¹⁵ Chen Ruoxi, “Ah-Chuang of Heaven-Blessed Village,” in *Spirit Calling*, 11-30. Also published as “Xinzhuang” 辛莊 (Xinzhuang), in *Chen Ruoxi zixuan ji*, 83-100. There is a close resemblance between this story and the later celebrated short story by one of Taiwan’s foremost modernist writers, Wang Zhenhe: 王禎和, “Jiazhuang yi niuche” 嫁妝一牛車 (An Ox-cart for Dowry) (Taipei: Yuanjing chubanshe, 1975).

Three stories feature modern, urban protagonists. “Burning night” 燃燒的夜¹⁶ describes the torment of a man who has confessed to a brief affair with a former classmate of his wife’s while she was away in Japan. His wife no longer communicates with him, slights him in public, and will not sleep with him. In “Appointment” 邀晤¹⁷ a university student has a match arranged for her in the traditional manner: a wealthy family is looking for a wife to accompany their son to the United States. The protagonist and her mother meet the matchmaker in a cafe which brings back sad memories for her: she had been stood up here the previous summer by a fellow student. Having lost all hope subsequent to this rejection, the protagonist acquiesces in her mother’s eager approval of the match. The protagonist of “Qiaoqi” 喬其¹⁸ is less submissive but more tortured: the 24 year-old student is due to leave Taiwan for graduate study in the United States, but plans to overdose on sleeping tablets in an apparent suicide bid. Her existential crisis results from a complex network of guilty feelings about sexual enjoyment and the feeling that she will never escape the control of her possessive mother and her boyfriend.

This early fiction is distinctively Nativist. The settings of all but the earliest stories are contemporary; both rural and urban protagonists face the impact of Taiwan’s modernisation and begin to contend with new economic conditions, values and social expectations. The stories are generally open-ended: with the exception of “The Grey-Eyed Black Cat” they do not offer moral judgements, simply portraying the pain of characters negotiating difficult personal situations, which are primarily caused by poverty. There is a distinct ambivalence about tradition: while gender inequalities are clearly indicated, economic factors are often more significant than traditional strictures in problematising the lives of the rural female protagonists. Rural characters with traditional beliefs are portrayed positively, in contrast to less sympathetically portrayed urban characters. Modernisation and greater prosperity are seen to bring new difficulties to marriage and relationships rather than solving any existing problems. There is no sense that characters might extricate themselves from the situations they face: the author provides some level of protest, but no alternative to the restricted world in which her characters exist.

¹⁶ Chen Ruoxi, “Ranshao de ye” 燃燒的夜 (Burning night), in *Chen Ruoxi zixuan ji*, 139-150.

¹⁷ “Appointment,” in *Spirit Calling*, 31-38. Also published as “Yao wu” 邀晤 (Appointment), in *Chen Ruoxi ji*, 31-36.

¹⁸ Chen Ruoxi, “Qiaoqi” 喬其 (Qiaoqi), in *Chen Ruoxi zixuan ji*, 101-116

2.2.2 Cultural Revolution Fiction

Two collections of short stories and one novel comprise Chen's Cultural Revolution fiction: *Mayor Yin* 尹縣長, *The Old Man* 老人 and *The Repatriates* 歸.¹⁹ Both collections of Cultural Revolution stories have been published in English, and the novel *The Repatriates* has been translated into German.²⁰ As this fiction is widely available and reviewed in English, plots will not be described in detail below, although where relevant for my analysis aspects of some will be discussed in later sections of this thesis.²¹

Of the fourteen short stories, six employ a third person narrative restricted to a male character's feelings and perceptions, eight feature a first-person female narrator. The first-person female narrators are all, like Chen, educated Taiwanese women who have voluntarily repatriated to the People's Republic from the United States.²² The novel *The Repatriates*, a third-person narrative restricted to the perspective of the female protagonist, is explicitly semi-autobiographical.²³ In an understated manner, the stories and the novel depict the cruel and senseless intrusion of politics into every facet of life, destructive of both human happiness and potential. Particularly in those stories with characters that can be identified with Chen, she tracks a process of disillusionment with a system to which the protagonists are initially committed. Main themes are the dictatorial nature of the regime, the wasteful and incompetent systems, the hollow and hypocritical rhetoric, arrogant leadership and the ease with which corruption and abuse are perpetrated. The low status of returnees and of women, the poor medical and educational facilities, and most of all the erasure of

¹⁹ Six stories are collected in *Yin xianzhang* 尹縣長 (Mayor Yin) (Taipei: Yuanjing chuban gongsi, 1976), seven in *Laoren* 老人 (The Old Man) (Taipei: Lianjing chuban gongsi, 1978). One additional Cultural Revolution story is included in *Chen Ruoxi ji*, 1976. *Gui* 歸 (The Repatriates) (Taipei: Lianjing chuban gongsi, 1978).

²⁰ Chen Ruoxi, *The Execution of Mayor Yin and Other Stories from the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution*, translated by Nancy Ing and Howard Goldblatt (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978). *The Old Man and Other Stories* (Hong Kong: Renditions, 1986). Translations of *Mayor Yin* are also available in Danish, Dutch, French, German, Japanese, Norwegian and Swedish. The two English collections feature slightly different selections from the original Chinese volumes of these titles: twelve of Chen's fourteen Cultural Revolution stories appear in them. Chen Jo-hsi, *Heimkehr in die Fremde*, translated from the Chinese by Chen Chai-hsin and Diethelm Hofstra (Horlemann: Bad Honnef, 1991). An extract from Chapter 3 of the novel is translated into English in George Kao ed. *Two Writers and the Cultural Revolution: Lao She and Chen Jo-hsi* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1980).

²¹ Full details of the many international reviews of this work are listed in Hsin-sheng C. Kao ed. *The Short Stories of Chen Ruoxi Translated from the Original Chinese: A Writer at the Crossroads* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 1-2. (Hereafter cited as Kao ed., *Crossroads*. I use the English translations provided in this volume, reverting to the Chinese or my own translation only where nuanced textual detail is required.)

²² The Chinese term 歸 *gui* literally means "return." Both are somewhat deceptive terms, as neither Chen nor her protagonists had ever been to the mainland, but it emphasises the extent to which China was regarded as the "homeland" for Taiwanese. I use the translation "repatriate" as adopted in Michael S. Duke, "Personae: Individual and Society in Three Novels by Chen Ruoxi", in Michael S. Duke, ed. *Modern Chinese Women Writers: Critical Appraisals* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1989), 53-77.

²³ Chen states in the Preface to *The Repatriates* that while it is not an autobiography, the novel is "for the most part written on the basis of my own personal experiences." *The Repatriates*, 1. It depicts a year in the life of a couple from Taiwan whose lives run an exactly parallel course to that of Chen and her husband: they repatriate to

individuality and the destruction of love, friendship and the family all feature prominently, in the context of the impossibility of escape from a totalitarian regime.²⁴

As with Chen's early fiction, the experiences of women are a prominent feature of many of the stories. The Communist liberation of women is undermined by the general oppression of both sexes: women's subordination to men in traditional marriage may be over, but marriage itself is torn apart when the state arbitrarily separates married couples through sending one partner down to the countryside, fails to provide married quarters, or exerts pressure on one party to divorce a politically discredited spouse. Personal feelings are often overridden by political considerations: the dictates of political campaigns affect residency status, so the desire to stay in the city or near family often override a woman's loyalty to her husband or potential partner.²⁵ Women still tend to bear the burden of household tasks and child-rearing despite full-time outside jobs, and double standards regarding sexual conduct persist in spite of a rhetoric of gender equality.

Chen left China with her husband in 1973, but the female protagonist of her novel *The Repatriates* decides to stay on to continue the struggle to build a new China after having lost her husband in a drowning accident in the same year. The husband's death (or suicide) symbolises the sweeping away of the naive optimism of the repatriates, but the protagonist's decision to stay on can be interpreted as a symbol of Chen's continuing commitment and dedication to her homeland. The novel was written in 1978, after the end of the Cultural Revolution, the death of Mao and the fall of the Gang of Four. Many felt that the rise of Deng Xiaoping and the promotion of the "four modernizations" was a new beginning for China.

However, the two stories by Chen which feature protagonists still based in China after the Cultural Revolution are both pessimistic. The eponymous protagonist of "Du Baihe" 杜百合²⁶ is a woman who has been forced to live apart from her husband for twenty of the twenty-five years they have been married. Distance has long erased much personal feeling between the couple, but she has remained committed to the family unit. Her hopes for her two children have also been disappointed (they were sent down to the countryside,

China in 1966, they have two children, and they are separated by their work units: the husband is sent to a cadre school in the countryside. The novel ends in 1973, the year Chen and her husband left China.

²⁴ Duke provides a much longer summary of the main themes of Chen's Cultural Revolution fiction: Duke, "Personae," 64.

²⁵ Chen Ruoxi, "My Friend Ai Fen," *The Old Man*, 90, 87, 105; *The Repatriates*, 215, 220; "Du Baihe" 杜百合 (Du Baihe), *Chengli chengwai*, 17. Many people were sent to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution; urban residency rights were highly prized.

²⁶ Chen Ruoxi, "Du Baihe" 杜百合 (Du Baihe), *Chengli chengwai*, (Inside Outside) (Taipei: Shibao chuban gongsi, 1981), 1-50.

and opt for marriage and a humble life rather than striving to fulfil their parents' ambitions of education, urban life and high professional status). She suddenly becomes aware of the truth of her daughter's charge that she has valued political idealism at the expense of her personal life. Du Baihe realises that her marriage exists in name only, and makes an application for divorce. The story concludes with the arrival of the divorce papers on the very day the protagonist hears her husband has finally been posted back to Beijing.

"The vice-premier's private jet" 副總理的專機²⁷ is narrated from the perspective of an injured member of the Chinese basketball team who had been put onto the vice-premier's private jet in order to fly back to Beijing from Tokyo, for hospitalisation. He is taken off the aeroplane at the last minute, to make room for private furniture purchased by the Chinese vice-premier during his state visit to Japan. The basketball player had witnessed the politician being humiliated during the Cultural Revolution: the respect and sympathy which he had previously felt for him heighten the irony of his current humiliation.²⁸

2.2.3 The transnational Chinese community in the United States

2.2.3.1 Pessimism about China

Chen's thematic concern of pessimism about political developments in China in the late 1970s continues in her fiction set in the United States. Overseas Chinese protagonists are disillusioned with compatriots both inside and outside the homeland. The stories depict hypocrisy and inconsistency both in "weathervanes" based in the US, who curry favour to seek opportunities for travel and special treatment when they visit either Taiwan or the PRC, and in those compatriots from the PRC who might mouth propaganda and high ideals but who are in fact desperate to find routes out of the country for personal advancement.

"Inside Outside" 城里城外²⁹ depicts a number of such "weathervanes," who attend a dinner party at the home of a professor of Chinese history at Stanford University. The US-based guests have sought their invitations from motives ranging from a genuine desire for

²⁷ Chen Ruoxi, "Fu zongli de zhuanji" 副總理的專機 (The vice-premier's private jet), *Chengli chengwai*, 147-161.

²⁸ An example of the type of censorship many writers publishing in different parts of the Chinese speaking world experienced is the fact that in the Taiwan publication no details of the vice-premier's supposed crimes are detailed (152), whereas in the Hong Kong publication of the same year he confesses to being a "capitalist roader". Chen Ruoxi, *Chengli chengwai*, (Inside Outside) (Hong Kong: Bafang chubanshe, 1981), 200.

²⁹ Chen Ruoxi, "Chengli chengwai" 城里城外 (Inside Outside), *Chengli chengwai* (Inside Outside), 51-84. Translated as "In and Outside the Wall" in Hsin-sheng C. Kao, *Nativism Overseas: Contemporary Chinese Women Writers* (Albany: State University of New York, 1993) and as "Another Fortress Besieged" in *The Old Man and Other Stories*. Chen's use of real people and an actual delegation led to some controversy and not inconsiderable offence, many individuals identifying themselves or other people as the basis of characters in the story. (As explained by Chen in her postscript to the collection, *Chengli chengwai*, 223-226.)

academic consultation to blatant self-promotion. The members of the delegation from the PRC display varying degrees of frankness about the current regime and their private goals. The most rigid apologist for the regime never lets his public face slip: only as he leaves the house does he secretly pass his hostess a note with his pitiful request for assistance in getting his son to the United States.

“Guest From the Homeland” 客自故鄉來³⁰ depicts the meeting of two friends from Taiwan who had both repatriated to the PRC during the Cultural Revolution. Luo Shaoyong had left in 1975, primarily to protect his children from ill treatment and discrimination. His friend had stayed on in the PRC and is currently on a trip to the United States to court overseas Chinese who might be persuaded to return to the mainland. Luo is dismayed by his friend’s pragmatic repudiation of all his former ideals: in pursuit of the “four modernisations” the former socialist idealist is now in favour of granting privileges to elites and returned scholars, denouncing political dissidents such as Wei Jingsheng. All Luo’s hopes for the mainland have dissolved following the suppression of the Democracy Wall movement, and he is bitter both about the motivations of returning scholars and the U-turn in China’s policies, which highlight the naiveté of his own idealistic sacrifice and suffering.

The recently divorced Taiwanese protagonist of “The Crossroads” 路口³¹ Yu Wenxiu, decides to return to Taiwan with her daughter after ten years in the United States, giving up the possibility of remarriage to a prominent Chinese professor in the United States who has tied his future to uncritical engagement with the PRC. Her suitor’s failure to protest the arrest of the prominent PRC dissident Wei Jingsheng spurs her into taking political action herself: she writes a letter to Deng Xiaoping at the same time as she decides not to accompany the professor to the mainland as his wife. Lin Yizhen, the protagonist of “On the Other Side of the Pacific” 向著太平洋彼岸,³² is in a similar situation to Yu Wenxiu except that she is widowed rather than divorced, and the man that she has the option of accompanying to the PRC from the United States has not compromised his ideals. Lin Yizhen has lived in Taiwan, Japan and the People’s Republic, where she and her (Mainlander) husband had suffered through the Cultural Revolution. In the short term she decides to stay in America with her two sons, who are about to attend university, but she

³⁰ Chen Ruoxi, “Ke zi guxiang lai” 客自故鄉來 (Guest From the Homeland), *Chengli chengwai*, 162-194. Translated in Kao ed., *Crossroads*.

³¹ Chen Ruoxi, “Lukou” 路口 (The Crossroads), *Chengli chengwai*, 85-146, translated in Kao ed., *Crossroads*.

³² Chen Ruoxi, “Xiangzhe Taipingyang bi’an” 向著太平洋彼岸 (On the Other Side of the Pacific), *Chengli chengwai* (Hong Kong: Bafang chubanshe, 1981), 210-296. The story also appeared in Li Li ed. *Haiwai huaren zuojia xiaoshuo xuan* (Overseas Chinese Writers: Selected Fiction) (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co., 1983) 220-273 and in translation in Kao, ed., *Crossroads*.

declares that she will visit both Taiwan and China in the future. A large cast of family members resident in both the United States and in Taiwan reflect the diverse positions of Taiwanese and overseas Chinese regarding their sense of identity and political purpose, debating in particular the Kaohsiung incident and the suppression of opposition activity in Taiwan.³³

In her postscript to the collection *Inside Outside* Chen acknowledges that she was often writing in impulsive response to contemporary political events, stating that now that the turbulent 1970s had come to an end she had resolved to do so no longer.³⁴ In later work, pessimism about China is still present, but in a less immediately political form: for example, "The Sorrow of Wang Zuo" 王左的悲哀,³⁵ published 1995, which depicts the disillusionment of an overseas Chinese who had hoped to play a role in re-establishing China's spiritual civilization by setting up a private lending library in Changsha. The project entails personal and financial sacrifice on the part of the protagonist, who has left his wife behind in the United States. However, books are continually stolen and eventually Wang Zuo himself is burgled: he finally washes his hands of the enterprise, deciding to return "home" to the United States.

2.2.3.2 Transnational relationships

Chen Ruoxi turned her hand to longer fiction in the 1980s, producing four novels set in California in which marriage and family are of central thematic concern. The range of characters and experiences present a wide spectrum of overseas Chinese life, including commentary from the varied perspectives of the characters and the implied author on American society and the changing societies of Taiwan and the People's Republic of China.

Breaking Out 突圍³⁶ is a novel in four parts, each of which is narrated from the perspective of one of the three central protagonists involved in a triangular relationship: long-term US resident and professor of Chinese literature, fifty-nine year-old Luo Xiangzhi, his forty year-old Taiwanese wife Lin Meiyue and his twenty-nine year-old mistress from the PRC, Li Xin. Xiangzhi and Meiyue's eight-year-old daughter is autistic. He blames

³³ The story appears in the Hong Kong edition of *Chengli Chengwai* but not in the Taiwan edition: it was banned in Taiwan because of its discussion of the murder of the family of Lin Yixiong, a Taiwanese senator implicated in the Kaohsiung Incident, which may have been politically motivated: the case has never been cleared.

³⁴ Chen Ruoxi, Postscript, *Chengli chengwai*, 223, 226.

³⁵ Chen Ruoxi, "Wang Zuo de beiai" 王左的悲哀 (The Sorrow of Wang Zuo), *Wang Zuo de beiai* (Taipei: Yuanliu chubanshe, 1995), 147-156. Wang Zuo is a nickname derived from the character's 'leftist' reputation among overseas Chinese during the Diaoyutai movement, Zuo Wang meaning 'King of the Left'.

³⁶ Chen Ruoxi, *Tuwei* 突圍 (Breaking Out) (Taipei: Lianjing chuban gongsi, 1983).

himself, fearing his age may have been a factor, while Meiyue feels she is responsible, for having conceived without love: she had married Xiangzhi after the politically-motivated murder of her boyfriend, a Taiwan independence activist, presumably in order to safeguard her residency status. She feels she does now love her husband, but for Xiangzhi it is too late: after many years of sexual indifference from his wife, he wants a divorce. If she could be sure that Xiangzhi and Li Xin would be happy together and care for her daughter, Meiyue feels that she would be willing to give up her family and return to Taiwan. However, fears for each other and for their daughter mean that neither is able to make the final break: only Li Xin appears to have resolved to break out of the entanglement by the end of the novel, informing Xiangzhi that she will be transferring to another university out-of-state.

Two sub-plots present further examples of complex marital relations: a male friend of Meizhi's, a confirmed bachelor and Taiwan independence activist without fixed employment, is transformed into a hard-working, responsible husband when his mother unexpectedly sends him an innocent girl from rural Taiwan to be his wife. A female friend of Meizhi's maintains what seems to be a perfect marriage, namely an acquiescent husband who has eyes only for his wife, but she explains that this is based on an elaborate strategy by which she deceives her husband into believing that he satisfies her sexually and that he has the true power in the relationship. (166-167) The novel exposes but does not elaborate on the power relations immanent in these marital 'transactions': the authorial voice, split between the narrative perspectives of the different characters, is weak.

The novel *Foresight* 遠見³⁷ returns to the perspective of a single female character and represents a culmination of Chen's portrayals of a woman negotiating marriage and relationships, deliberating where to live, and whether or not to tie her future to a man (as featured in "The Crossroads", "On the Other Side of the Pacific" and *Breaking Out*). At the instigation of her husband the Taiwanese protagonist Liao Shuzhen spends two difficult years in the United States working as a live-in housekeeper while her daughter attends high school, so that she can obtain a green card and secure residency rights for the whole family. (Her husband, a Mainlander, is worried about Taiwan's long-term security.) She remains faithful during their long separation in spite of the sexual advances of her employer and her attraction to a visiting scholar from the People's Republic: a man who epitomises every

³⁷ Chen Ruoxi, *Yuanjian* 遠見 (Foresight) (Taipei: Yuanjing chuban gongsi, 1984).

virtue.³⁸ After obtaining her green card she discovers that her husband, in contrast, has been unfaithful throughout their separation: the affair had begun even before she had left for the United States. He expects her to adopt his illegitimate son and give up the house her father had left her to his mistress, determined that they should not divorce: he still wants his green card. Shocked and disillusioned (she had felt that her rather passionless arranged marriage had at least offered security), Liao Shuzhen returns to the United States to consider her position. Although she had initially been reluctant to move to the United States and is still worried about the Americanisation of her daughter, she has more opportunities there: she can work, she considers studying for a qualification, and the prospect of a relationship with the man from the People's Republic is open to her.

Once again, two sub-plots present alternative marital experiences and choices. A Taiwanese friend of Shuzhen's is likewise confronted with her husband's infidelity, but she immediately sues for a divorce. From her perspective, life for a divorcee in Taiwan is bleak, with the law favouring the husband (he is likely to be granted custody of their two children) and the woman unlikely to find another partner. Another friend, from the People's Republic, assiduously seeks a husband in order to be able to stay on in California. She is openly pragmatic: her first marriage failed, and she has no aspirations to marry for love a second time. When she marries a Jewish professor of Asian history she takes on two adopted children, a black teenage boy and a Vietnamese girl, and agrees not to have any further children of her own (she had left her own daughter in the PRC with her first husband).

The Two Hus 二胡³⁹ depicts the dilemmas of two men regarding their responsibilities to the families they had abandoned in China, once the 1980s had opened up the possibility of contact with and visits to relatives in the People's Republic. California resident Hu Weiheng, Old Hu, returns to his village in Hangzhou for the first time in fifty years. He had emigrated to the United States in the 1930s, divorcing the illiterate peasant woman his family had forced him to marry. While she was left to bring up their son and care selflessly for his parents until their deaths, Old Hu had married again twice. He had not been an ideal husband to any of his wives: he had lost most of his money gambling on the stock exchange, and had had numerous affairs. Before his visit to Hangzhou he had hoped to be able to find a fourth wife there, confident that his life insurance would enable him to secure a suitably attractive and cultured woman ten or twenty years his junior to accompany him

³⁸ These are listed by Duke, who notes the difficulty many readers might have in believing his characterization: "Chen ... has attributed to him almost every conceivable admirable and desirable trait to create her ideal type of the Chinese intellectual." Duke, "Personae," 71.

back to United States. (133-134) At their reunion, however, Old Hu is moved by the enduring loyalty and long suffering of his first wife, now very ill. He decides that he will stay with her rather than return to the United States (even though his grandchildren tell him that his status as an overseas Chinese relative is of much more practical use to them than his presence would be). In the event, his wife dies within a day of their reunion, and the only sacrifice he needs to make is financial: he pays for an expensive traditional funeral and a burial plot, which will also be reserved for his own bones. He returns to the United States, planning to help his two grandchildren emigrate and put them through university.

The second Hu is Old Hu's nephew, Hu Jinghan, a civil servant in Taiwan. He had been forced to abandon his wife, Qihua, and their two children when the Nationalists fled to Taiwan during the civil war. Although he is involved in a long-term relationship with a Taiwanese woman, Yang Lixing, he had always refused to consider a bigamous marriage and had moved out of the apartment he had shared with Lixing seven years previously, as soon as he had discovered that Qihua was still alive. Old Hu has since served as a go-between to enable them to write letters to each other via the United States. As a civil servant, Hu Jinghan is unable to travel legally to the People's Republic: his plan is for Old Hu to take Qihua to the United States, where she would have to remain for five years before being allowed to move to Taiwan. After learning of her husband's circumstances, however, Qihua decides not to leave China. She offers him a divorce so that he can marry Lixing, asking only that he help their son emigrate. Hu Jinghan is torn: the novel ends with his decision to travel to the People's Republic himself to discuss the future with Qihua, in spite of the consequences this might entail if the Taiwan authorities find out.

Paper Marriage 紙婚⁴⁰ is written in the format of first-person diary entries by a thirty-five year-old woman from the People's Republic, You Taiping (Pingping), who has married a gay American photographer, Sean, in order to avoid deportation after being caught working on a student visa. She rents a room from him so that they can prove to immigration authorities that they are living together, on the understanding that she will move out and they will divorce as soon as she obtains her green card. While his motivation for the arrangement is unclear (he does not request or receive any payment), she benefits greatly: aside from the green card, she gains independence from her Chinese relatives, part-time work at the gallery run by Sean and a Taiwanese friend, and introduction to a number of Sean's friends, who are helpful in encouraging Pingping to establish herself as a sculptor.

³⁹ Chen Ruoxi, *Er Hu* 二胡 (The Two Hus) (Taipei: Dunli chubanshe, 1985).

Pingping quickly falls in love with Sean: she actively courts his approval, cooking and caring for him. She regards homosexuality as an unfortunate aberration, caused by social decline and/or disrupted parenting. As Sean has not always identified as gay, she hopes to convince him to recant. The novel bears witness to the beginnings of awareness about HIV and AIDS in the United States in the early 1980s: Sean contracts AIDS and Pingping's investigations serve as a tool for the author to provide detailed information on the prejudices, the medical treatment and the statistics of the AIDS epidemic. Pingping cares for Sean throughout his illness, increasingly viewing their marriage as genuine. Upon his death, nine months after their wedding, Sean's will seems to confirm this perception: he leaves his house, car, money and liabilities to his "beloved wife"(372).

2.2.4 Looking back at home

The four novels detailed above feature a constellation of characters based primarily in the United States, negotiating relationships with other characters from the United States, Taiwan and the People's Republic. Three collections of short fiction follow in the 1990s. A few stories focus on life in the United States, but there are more depictions of characters based primarily in Taiwan and Hong Kong. The themes are similar: personal and family dilemmas, often engendered by the transnational experience. Practical and political issues (Taiwan's insecurity, the handover of Hong Kong) exacerbate the difficulties presented by the clash of traditional and modern values, but in this later fiction the questioning of traditional values and the exposure of the abuses inherent in the patriarchal Chinese system become much stronger and more explicit. Chen's characters are once more "at home", or want to go there: the author's turning back elicits a newly critical look at the societies of Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The thirty-six stories in *The Woman from Guizhou* 貴州女人,⁴¹ *The Sorrows of Wang Zuo* 王左的悲哀⁴² and *A Daughter's Home* 女兒的家⁴³ were first published in newspapers in Hong Kong and Taipei, before Chen Ruoxi's repatriation to Taiwan in 1995. Below, they are grouped thematically rather than chronologically. Five deal with problems experienced by Chinese residents of California, ten deal with family relationships, and the remaining twenty stories feature problematic marital and extra-marital relationships.

⁴⁰ Chen Ruoxi, *Zhihun* 紙婚(Paper Marriage) (Taipei: Zili wanbaoshe, 1986).

⁴¹ Chen Ruoxi, *Guizhou nüren* 貴州女人(The Woman from Guizhou) (Taipei: Yuanliu chubanshe, 1989).

⁴² Chen Ruoxi, *Wang Zuo de beiai* 王左的悲哀(The Sorrows of Wang Zuo) (Taipei: Yuanliu chubanshe, 1995).

⁴³ Chen Ruoxi, *Nü'er de jia* 女兒的家 (A Daughter's Home) (Taipei: Tansuo chubanshe, 1998).

2.2.4.1 California Blues

“It’s Your House, but It’s My Home!” 雖是你的房子，卻是我的家, “Twenty Thousand Dollars Less...” 不認輸兩萬元的話 和 “Spring valley” 長春谷⁴⁴ all depict situations in which Chinese characters suffer material losses as a result of what are perceived by the protagonists to be unhelpful or ridiculously liberal Californian laws which fail to protect the interests of land and property owners: rent control, the occupancy rights of sitting tenants, and the failure of the authorities to evict squatters from unoccupied land respectively. The tone of the narration displays a politically conservative response to the rights extended to the less well-off or dispossessed in California, who are portrayed negatively in both appearance and action, be they Cantonese, white American or Mexican.

Racial issues are touched upon in two stories. In “Where does the blame lie?” 到底錯在哪里?⁴⁵ two Chinese students are murdered by a black classmate. “A scorched cross on the lawn” 草地上燒焦的十字架⁴⁶ describes a young Taiwanese narrator’s reaction to the planting of the symbol of the Ku Klux Klan on a Taiwanese family’s lawn in a high class, predominantly white, residential area.

2.2.4.2 The decline of the traditional multigenerational household

Chinese parents who fund their children’s study abroad or otherwise encourage their expatriation have made the pragmatic choice of sacrificing family unity for the educational and economic opportunities and political stability offered by the West, potentially a lifeline in the event of a catastrophe at home. The traditional obligations on children to care for their parents in their old age, however, becomes problematic when these parents are still living in relative security in Taiwan or Hong Kong, but their children have settled permanently abroad and adopted western lifestyles. A number of Chen’s stories explore the difficult dynamics of such situations. The traditional “togetherness” of the multigenerational family is hindered by various obstacles and tested by various circumstances, but the overarching theme is a questioning of the ideal of family unity and the patriarchal system that governs the traditional family unit.

⁴⁴ Chen Ruoxi, “Sui shi ni de fangzi, que shi wo de jia” 雖是你的房子，卻是我的家 (It’s Your House, but It’s My Home!), *Wang Zuo*, 105-108. Translated in Kao ed., *Crossroads*; “Bu renshu liangwanyuan de hua” 不認輸兩萬元的話 (Twenty Thousand Dollars Less...), *Wang Zuo*, 119-128. Kao ed., *Crossroads*; “Chang chun gu” 長春谷 (Spring valley), *Wang Zuo*, 87-94.

⁴⁵ Chen Ruoxi, “Daodi cuo zai nali?” 到底錯在哪里? (Where does the blame lie?), *The Woman from Guizhou*, 123-140.

⁴⁶ Chen Ruoxi, “Caodi shang shaojiao de shizijia” 草地上燒焦的十字架 (A scorched cross on the lawn), *Wang Zuo*, 81-86.

“Flying back to Taiwan” 飛回台灣⁴⁷ features a twenty-eight year-old American-trained airline pilot who might seem to espouse the traditional virtue of filiality over expediency: he has returned to Taiwan to do his military service, even though his parents had sent him abroad before his sixteenth birthday specifically to avoid this onerous burden.⁴⁸ The moral of the story, however, is exactly the opposite: the son has decided to stop allowing the wishes of his parents to dictate his actions, both in his career and in matters of the heart. In this case, the son’s decision to go against his parents wishes brings him back to his family home, allowing him to see his father before he dies and effecting a sense of reconciliation at the end of the story.

More commonly, Chen’s characters make decisions which involve permanent separation of the generations in order to optimise the happiness of individual members of the family. In “Birthday feast” 壽宴⁴⁹ a Hong Kong woman decides against inviting her parents to live with her in Canada, after being reminded of the trivial but bitter fighting that her parents have indulged in since she was a child. In “Green Card” 綠卡 the security advantages and the comfort of proximity to their two children are weighed against the emptiness of an old couple’s life in the United States and the inconvenience of constant travelling back and forth to preserve their residency rights: the male protagonist insists he and his wife return to Taiwan permanently. Even within Taiwan itself, the comforts of a rural home win over the traditional imperative of family unity in “Aunt Qingshui goes home” 清水孀回家⁵⁰: the depression of an old woman whose sons had pressurised her to come and live with them in Taipei is assuaged only by her return to the rural south, in spite of her sons’ worries that they will be seen as unfilial.

In two stories, children heartlessly betray their parents’ expectations of family unity. However, in both cases, the elderly seem to welcome their liberty once overcoming their initial disappointment. The old couple in “Ah, Chopin’s hometown” 啊，蕭邦的故鄉⁵¹ had planned to spend their retirement in Canada with their two children. As 1997 nears, they discover that their son has still not made any arrangements to apply for residency on their behalf, and further that he has sold off their Canadian property investments to cover his own debts. This precipitates a complete rethink: they decide to stay on where they belong in spite of the uncertainty of Hong Kong’s future, and to enjoy their retirement through holidaying

⁴⁷ Chen Ruoxi, “Feihui Taiwan” 飛回台灣 (Flying back to Taiwan), *A Daughter’s Home*, 87-112.

⁴⁸ Until 2000 ROC regulations prohibited males over sixteen years from leaving the country until they had completed military service. Military service was also obligatory if a male national returned to the island before the age of 30.

⁴⁹ Chen Ruoxi, “Shou yan” 壽宴 (Birthday feast), *Wang Zuo*, 71-80.

⁵⁰ Chen Ruoxi, “Qingshui shen huijia” 清水孀回家 (Aunt Qingshui goes home), *A Daughter’s Home*, 189-206.

⁵¹ Chen Ruoxi, “Ah, Xiaobang de guxiang” 啊，蕭邦的故鄉 (Ah, Chopin’s hometown), *Wang Zuo*, 157-166.

rather than helping care for their grandchildren. The widowed protagonist of “A Mother’s loneliness” 媽媽寂寞⁵² flies to San Francisco from Hong Kong believing she is set to spend her retirement in the care of her son and his family. She is picked up from the airport by a personable and courteous old man, who, it transpires, had paid for her flight to the United States himself: her son has “sold” her in response to an advertisement by this Chinese widower, who is looking for “companionship followed by marriage”. Although she is initially horrified, the story ends with the widow feeling rather seduced by the prospect of a new life with him.

In all of the above cases, various factors conspire against the traditional ideal of family togetherness: both positive (in the sense of active choice) and negative (where some members of the family let others down). Chen’s most explicit debate on traditional family values is featured in the story “Patricide” 抹殺爸爸⁵³, depicting a conflict between two half-brothers regarding their father’s impending death after a series of strokes. All are long-term US residents. The youngest son, a doctor, has arranged for his father to die at home without aggressive medical intervention. His elder brother feels that this is tantamount to murder: a cold, “American” way of treating one’s own flesh and blood, whereas a good Chinese son would do all he could to prolong his father’s life. The story is told from the perspective of the youngest sister, who concludes the narrative by condoning her younger brother’s decision. In the final analysis, new values and judgements about quality of life weigh more heavily than traditional imperatives regarding filial conduct.

The health of the traditional family is further questioned in two psychologically revealing monologues by disturbed first-person narrators (uncharacteristic of Chen’s usual style), both of which indicate the destructive potential of domineering, traditionally-minded women on their families. The mother in “Morning Encounter With a Stranger” 遇見陌生女子的那天上午⁵⁴ has ruined all her son’s chances of marital happiness through continually vetoing his choice of partner, while the thirty-three year-old son in “My nightmare” 我的惡夢⁵⁵ is impotent, his condition clearly related to a Freudian castration complex associated with his mother. The indictment of women’s role in the patriarchal system is, however, not a common theme in Chen’s fiction: more often, the focus is on the ease with which the patriarchal structure can be used to exploit women. The protagonist of “A Daughter’s home”

⁵² Chen Ruoxi, “Mama jimo” 媽媽寂寞 [A Mother’s loneliness], *A Daughter’s Home*, 1-11.

⁵³ Chen Ruoxi, “Mosha baba” 抹殺爸爸 (Patricide), *Guizhou nüren*, 169-188.

⁵⁴ Chen Ruoxi, “Yujian mosheng nüzi de natian shangwu” 遇見陌生女子的那天上午 (Morning Encounter with a Stranger), *The Woman from Guizhou*, 103-122.

⁵⁵ Chen Ruoxi, “Wo de e’meng” 我的惡夢 [My nightmare], *A Daughter’s Home*, 13-22.

女兒的家⁵⁶ is a victim of her husband, brothers and father. Having spent her life providing for the male members of her family, she is abandoned by her husband and disinherited by her brothers on the death of her father, who has never sought to ensure that she was catered for in his will: having married out, she is no longer regarded as a member of the family. "Father's portrait" 父親的畫像⁵⁷ depicts the venality of an eldest son who uses his privileged position in the family hierarchy to claim, and then sell, a valuable portrait of his deceased father. The younger son's wife, who had cared for her father-in-law for the last ten years of his life, had wanted to keep the painting for its sentimental value.

2.2.4.3 The selfish male

Many other stories depict selfish male behaviour similar to the above, ranging from mild despotism within the family to violent assault. A common situation is the transpacific separation of husbands and wives. The Taiwanese protagonist of "Suyue's New Year's Eve" 素月的除夕⁵⁸ works illegally as a maid in the United States to support her two sons through high school. Her husband, a Mainlander twenty years her senior, remains in Taiwan. It is he who has insisted that his sons should receive a good education and an American college degree, regardless of the sacrifice in splitting the family. Both parents suffer from the separation, but Suyue also has to cope with the difficulty of bringing up her teenage sons alone in the United States, where they are losing their Chinese identity. The young female protagonist of "You have to leave in order to stay" 爲了留下，你要先走⁵⁹ works as a live-in maid to an elderly American woman to help support herself through an undergraduate degree in the United States, after which she has undertaken to return to Hong Kong to teach English at the church school which supported her as an orphan. Her Hong Kong-based husband, however, wants her to stay on, so that she can obtain green cards for them both. The protagonist is very reluctant, as she feels strongly for Hong Kong and dislikes her servitude and the denigrating way she is treated by her American employer. She concedes, however, after her husband sends her newspaper evidence that the situation in China does not augur well for the independence of post-1997 Hong Kong.

These two stories could be read as simply depicting husbands exercising their best judgement on behalf of the security and welfare of whole family, even though their decisions mean separation of husband and wife. Other stories are much more cutting about

⁵⁶ Chen Ruoxi, "Nü'er de jia" 女兒的家 (A Daughter's home) *A Daughter's Home*, 141-160.

⁵⁷ Chen Ruoxi, "Fuqin de huaxiang" 父親的畫像 (Father's portrait), *A Daughter's Home*, 161-168.

⁵⁸ Chen Ruoxi, "Suyue de chuxi" 素月的除夕 (Suyue's New Year's Eve), *The Woman from Guizhou*, 81-102.

⁵⁹ Chen Ruoxi, "Weile liuxia, ni yao xian zou" 爲了留下，你要先走 (You have to leave in order to stay), *Wang Zuo*, 95-104.

the men who stay behind in Taiwan or Hong Kong while their wives live difficult lives in the West. "A husband's space of his own" 丈夫自己的空間⁶⁰ is narrated from the perspective of a Hong Kong woman who has spent three years in Canada at the instigation of her husband, working as a seamstress to support her children through college and to gain residency rights. Just as she has finally begun to make a success of her life abroad, she discovers that her husband has been having affairs ever since she left, and that he has changed his mind about emigrating. He proposes that they simply carry on as they are: living separately to allow him to continue enjoying some "space of his own." (137) The male protagonist of "Restoration of the stately male" 重振雄風⁶¹ is tempted to establish a second home with his mistress in Shenzhen, where he often travels on business from his home in Hong Kong. Lacking the courage to do so immediately, he decides to take action once his wife has moved to Australia, where they plan to emigrate prior to the handover of Hong Kong. His plans are scuppered when his wife decides that she too will travel back and forth between Hong Kong and Australia, rather than move there permanently before he does.

"It might be a boy" 說不定是個男孩⁶² is narrated from the perspective of a US-based Taiwanese man who has become impotent in relations with his wife after the couple have endured a long period of failing to conceive. He secretly seeks out an ex-girlfriend who he had pressured into a number of abortions, hoping that she might have kept the child of their last pregnancy against his will: she had been convinced it was a boy. It is only when he is certain that his ex-girlfriend had not had his child (and learns, with regret, that she has become permanently infertile) that he concedes he will have to go ahead with his wife's plans for a surrogate pregnancy. If he had discovered that he already had descendants of his own, he would not have done so, regardless of his wife's desire for a child.

"A Reckless Husband's Defence" 莽夫的告白⁶³ is a monologue representing the male first person protagonist's portion of a dialogue with a doctor who is assessing his mental state for a pending court case: he has seriously assaulted his wife, who may never walk again, because she had announced that she was going to divorce him and move back to Taiwan. Although clearly deranged, unaware of the seriousness of his actions and the

⁶⁰ Chen Ruoxi, "Zhangfu ziji de kongjian" 丈夫自己的空間 (A husband's space of his own), *Wang Zuo*, 129-138. The title is an ironic adaptation of the title of a story by a contemporary of Chen's: Yuan Qiongqiong, *Ziji de tiankong* 自己的天空 (A Space of One's Own) (Taipei: Hongfan shudian, 1985), which itself is a reference to Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*.

⁶¹ Chen Ruoxi, "Zhongzhen xiongfeng" 重振雄風 (Restoration of the stately male), *A Daughter's Home*, 23-35.

⁶² Chen Ruoxi, "Shuobuding shi ge nanhai" 說不定是個男孩 (It might be a boy), *Wang Zuo*, 45-52.

⁶³ Chen Ruoxi, "Mangfu de gaobai" 莽夫的告白 (A Reckless Husband's Defence), *A Daughter's Home*, 131-139.

charges against him, the protagonist's abuse of his wife is revealed to be on a continuum of dominance which he had exercised from the very beginning of their relationship.

2.2.4.4 Women asserting themselves

Women do not always succumb to dominance or exploitation by male partners. A number of stories show women either escaping from bad relationships or asserting themselves within relationships where they might be perceived as the disadvantaged partner. In "We're going to Reno" 我們上雷諾去⁶⁴ the US-based first person female narrator from Taiwan initially feels pity for a forty-year-old woman from the People's Republic who undertakes a bigamous marriage with a much older, unsympathetic overseas Chinese. It quickly becomes apparent, however, that the woman is no helpless victim: her plan is to obtain a green card, outlive her new husband and then seek to bring her own husband and child to the US from the PRC. As soon as the shotgun wedding in Reno is over she becomes drunk and belligerent, leaving the weak and exhausted groom to retire alone while she gambles his money away.

"The Woman from Guizhou" 貴州女人⁶⁵ is narrated from the perspective of a rather more sympathetic old overseas Chinese man who has married a young woman from Guizhou in a pragmatic transaction: her care of his everyday and sexual needs in exchange for residency in the United States and escape from poverty. She has never been happy with him, but he has persuaded her to stay through emotional blackmail and by making an arrangement for her to take a lover. When the lover cuts off the relationship, she appears to have made the final break: the old man returns to an empty house.

"Vietnamese bride" 越南新娘⁶⁶ is narrated by a Taiwanese woman whose mother is at loggerheads with her thirty-six year-old son's teenage Vietnamese wife. The girl is one of a reported fifteen thousand brides from Vietnam acquired by Taiwanese men who are unable or unwilling to find local partners. She belies their reputation for docile passivity, however: she has been demanding money from him to send home, in the absence of which she withdraws sex and threatens to petition for divorce. The narrator resolves the situation by extricating her interfering mother from her sister-in-law's household, ordering her brother to hand over all the domestic finances and household responsibilities to his wife. Harmony is established within two months: the girl becomes pregnant, and there is no more talk of divorce.

⁶⁴ Chen Ruoxi, "Women shang Leinuo qu" 我們上雷諾去 (We're going to Reno), *Wang Zuo*, 27-44.

⁶⁵ Chen Ruoxi, "Guizhou nüren" 貴州女人 (The Woman From Guizhou), *The Woman from Guizhou*, 141-168.

⁶⁶ Chen Ruoxi, "Yuenan xinniāng" 越南新娘 (Vietnamese bride), *A Daughter's Home*, 169-187.

A number of female characters assert themselves in a struggle to preserve their marriage in spite of their husband's jeopardising of the relationship through infidelity. "Play dumb" 裝傻⁶⁷ is the advice that the worldly-wise and cynical first person narrator, whose own marriage is on the rocks, passes on to a woman who wishes to save her marriage after hearing that her husband has been having an affair. "The other woman" 第三者⁶⁸ depicts the attempt of a Hong Kong woman to win back her husband from his mainland mistress.

2.2.4.5 Independent women

The stories depicting women determined to save their marriages in spite of their husbands' infidelities all feature women who are resident in Taiwan or Hong Kong, where it is made clear in a number of stories that life as a divorcee is difficult. Characters resident in the United States almost invariably opt for divorce and independence, although they might admire the ability of some of their compatriots at home to tolerate less-than-perfect relationships. The twice-divorced US-based first person narrator of "Yuantong temple" 圓通寺⁶⁹ comes back to Taiwan for a visit, and contrasts her situation with that of her cousin, who accepts her fate as the wife of an abusive, demanding and unfaithful husband, preserving the family for the sake of her children. The narrator, who had been unwilling to sacrifice her own happiness for the sake of her son, expresses an ambivalent admiration for her cousin, wondering at her apparent happiness and equanimity.

Four stories feature Taiwanese women in the United States coming to terms with the end of relationships, finding new confidence and resolve in being alone. The protagonist of "Ah Lan's Decision" 阿蘭的捐獻⁷⁰ finally finds the strength to sign the divorce papers which will allow her husband to marry his mistress. The protagonist of "Performance" 演戲⁷¹ ceases to hide the fact of her divorce from her daughter, and resolves to live a more independent life, including the possibility of a new relationship (she and her husband are still living together, for the child's sake). "Roses and calamus" 玫瑰和菖蒲⁷² features a divorced protagonist who is estranged from her husband and avoids him when he comes to pick up their son for weekend custody visits. She cannot understand the older generations' conciliatory attitude to infidelity in marriage. By the end of the story, however, the daughter finds she respects and even envies her mother's peaceful stance. She resolves no longer to

⁶⁷ Chen Ruoxi, "Zhuang sha" 裝傻 (Play dumb), *A Daughter's Home*, 65-72.

⁶⁸ Chen Ruoxi, "Di sanzhe" 第三者 (The other woman), *A Daughter's Home*, 37-49.

⁶⁹ Chen Ruoxi, "Yuantong shi" 圓通寺 (Yuantong temple), *Wang Zuo*, 17-26

⁷⁰ Chen Ruoxi, "A-lan de juanxian" 阿蘭的捐獻 (Literally, Ah Lan's Contribution), *Wang Zuo*, 139-146. Translated as Ah Lan's Decision in Kao ed., *Crossroads*.

⁷¹ Chen Ruoxi, "Yanxi" 演戲 (Performance), *Wang Zuo*, 53-62.

⁷² Chen Ruoxi, "Meigui he changpu" 玫瑰和菖蒲 (Roses and calamus), *Wang Zuo*, 63-70.

cut off her own ex-husband from the rest of her family. The Taiwanese protagonist of “Walking out of the drizzling mist” 走出細雨濛濛⁷³ has been having an affair with a married professor for eight years. When it finally becomes clear that his promises to divorce and marry her are empty, she resolves to waste no more time on the relationship, confident that she will make it alone.

In two further stories women return to Taiwan to start again after a broken relationship: the protagonist of “Divorce American-style” 美式離婚⁷⁴ decides to return to Taiwan with her two children, regardless of their father’s visitation and custody rights, when he defaults on maintenance payments after having left her for another woman. The US-based Taiwanese protagonist of “Just ignore it” 不理它⁷⁵ is tricked by her overseas Vietnamese-Chinese husband and his mother into unwittingly agreeing to a divorce in which she forgoes all her rights to their son and common property. Her husband has divorced her not in order to effect a separation but in order to be sure of his control over her. This is too much for the protagonist, however: she cannot “just ignore it,” but leaves alone, presumably for Taiwan.

2.2.4.6 Rehabilitation of Taiwan’s “new women”

A number of male characters in Chen Ruoxi’s stories express anxiety about Taiwan’s “new women” (新女性 *xin nǚxing*): one of the reasons cited by the murderous husband of “A Reckless Husband’s Defence” for not allowing his wife to return to Taiwan was that it was full of radical feminists who were leading “good” women astray.⁷⁶ “If you love me” 如果你愛我⁷⁷ tells a more positive story, in which fears about Taiwan’s “new women” are exposed as unwarranted. The first person narrator, a Taiwanese widower, is being courted by a neighbour who had divorced her previous husband after suffering years of abuse. Although she is very personable, the narrator is suspicious of such independent and assertive women, because an old friend, Hu Wanfeng, now in the United States, had married just such a type after his first wife had left him. On the day of their wedding she had made him sign a document promising that he would leave all his money to her (rather than his children) should anything happen to him. Both men find this deeply unsettling. Resentful of his new wife’s supposed ownership of his wealth, Hu loses his desire to accumulate capital and begins to donate money to good causes in Taiwan. Surprisingly, she does not seem to object. She accompanies Hu to Taiwan for the opening of a library he has funded,

⁷³ Chen Ruoxi, “Zouchu xiyu mengmeng” 走出細雨濛濛 (Walking out of the drizzling mist), *Wang Zuo*, 7-16.

⁷⁴ Chen Ruoxi, “Meishi lihun” 美式離婚 (Divorce American-style), *A Daughter’s Home*, 73-86.

⁷⁵ Chen Ruoxi, “Bu li ta” 不理它 (Just ignore it), *A Daughter’s Home*, 51-63.

⁷⁶ Chen Ruoxi, “Mangfu de gaobai” 莽夫的告白 (A Reckless Husband’s Defence), *A Daughter’s Home*, 134-136.

and the narrator is surprised to meet a plump, middle-aged looking woman, not the money-hungry vamp he had expected. His fears about “new women”, and about the potential relationship with his neighbour, melt away.

2.2.5 Critical Reception

Chen Ruoxi's literary talents were identified early on by her teachers and mentors. When her first collection was published in 1962, an official involved in a US Information Service project to translate Taiwan's contemporary fiction and verse into English referred to her as “one of Free China's most promising younger writers.” Describing her “intuitive understanding of the role that traditional family and social institutions play in the life of the people she grew up among,” he hoped that she would continue to exhibit the sense of place he found in her stories.⁷⁸ Leo Ou-fan Lee described Chen's Cultural Revolution fiction in 1979 as “a unique kind of ‘recherche du temps perdu.’” He had found her early work, by contrast, lacking in “substance and vision” and had felt that while “an enormously gifted writer,” she “had yet to find a subject worthy of her talents.”⁷⁹ Lee and many other reviewers argued that in spite of her plain language, Chen's Cultural Revolution stories should not be viewed as reportage or political tract, but as masterly fiction which should be accorded the respect due to literature. Simon Leys calls her a “Chinese creative writer of major stature” in his introduction to the English translation of *Mayor Yin*.⁸⁰

Criticism which echoes Lee's comments about a lack of “substance and vision” in Chen's work have nevertheless continued. After reading just seven of her fourteen Cultural Revolution stories, Timothy Light states that Chen seems to have “exhausted her theme.” He feels that the portrayal of naive idealism, disillusionment and exile cannot withstand much repetition, and that the very authenticity of Chen's stories, her control in depicting only what she knows, becomes, in the end, “limiting and limited.”⁸¹ Hsu Kai-yu remarks that Chen's “sense of history tends often enough to let her absorption in social criticism overpower her

⁷⁷ Chen Ruoxi, “Ruguo ni ai wo” 如果你愛我 (If you love me), *A Daughter's Home*, 113-130.

⁷⁸ Richard McCarthy, introduction to Lucy H Chen, *Spirit Calling*, vii. Richard McCarthy was instrumental in helping many young writers gain recognition and opportunities to study abroad. See also Richard M McCarthy, “Chen Jo-hsi: Memoirs and Notes,” *Renditions* 10 (Autumn 1978): 90-92.

⁷⁹ Leo Ou-fan Lee, “Dissent Literature from the Cultural Revolution” (*Chinese Literature* Vol. 1, 1979), 59-60.

⁸⁰ Details of the many international reviews of Chen's Cultural Revolution fiction are listed in the introduction to Kao ed., *Crossroads*, 1-2. Simon Leys, “Who is Chen Jo-hsi?” Introduction to Chen Jo-hsi, *The Execution of Mayor Yin and Other Stories from the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution* (Bloomington: IUP, 1978), xxii-xxviii.

⁸¹ Timothy Light, Book Review of *The Execution of Mayor Yin and Other Stories from the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution* by Chen Ruoxi (*Chinese Literature* Vol. 1, 1979): 133.

artistic restraint.”⁸² While acknowledging Chen’s position as one of the most prolific and important overseas Chinese writers of the last decade, Michael Duke’s thesis too is that “Chen Ruoxi’s literary corpus to date represents a kind of serial *Bildungswerke* in the literal sense of a ‘work of self education,’” and that while she demonstrates great sympathy for and ability to interpret the Chinese national character her stories are “excessively mimetic and insufficiently imaginative.” He feels Chen “should be able to do better” in terms of literary achievement, rather than content herself with mere “historical significance.”⁸³

Helmut Martin and Jeffrey Kinkley acknowledge Chen’s Nativist work in their comment that she was “perhaps a precursor of the *xiangtu* [Nativist] authors,” and praise her by invoking the name of her most famous literary forbear: “she analyzes the ‘Chinese national character’ . . . somewhat as Lu Xun did decades before. . . [serving] as both a bridge and a conscience [for] all parts of the Chinese-speaking world.”⁸⁴

In her most recent collections, Chen has clearly chosen to continue writing social criticism rather than aiming for literary greatness. Her earliest stated aim was to portray the inhabitants of her native place: their struggle for their livelihoods and their “more authentic, healthier” expression of and lust for life.⁸⁵ She then explicitly committed herself to a realistic representation of life in Cultural Revolution China: she sought “to have something important to say, to employ a plain and unadorned diction to recount the lives of plain and honest people, to reveal and to protest somewhat the agony of their experiences.”⁸⁶

Critics writing in English have yet to address the gender politics that Chen has made the theme of most of her recent work, and there is to date only a very limited amount of feminist criticism of her work in Chinese.⁸⁷ This thesis takes up that task, looking across the range of her work for Chen’s depiction of both the joys and the agony of the experiences of women.

⁸² Hsu Kai-yu, “A Sense of History: Reading Chen Jo-hsi’s Stories,” in Jeannette L. Faurot, ed. *Chinese Fiction from Taiwan: Critical Perspectives* (Bloomington: IUP, 1980), 207, 231.

⁸³ Duke bases his reading on work published up to 1990, which includes all her novels but not the later three collections of short stories discussed above. Duke, “Personae.”

⁸⁴ Helmut Martin and Jeffrey Kinkley eds., *Modern Chinese Writers: Self-portrayals* (Armonk, New York and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1992), 186.

⁸⁵ Chen Ruoxi, afterword to *Chen Ruoxi zixuan ji*, 194.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 194. Translated by Duke in “Personae,” 56.

⁸⁷ One notable exception is Wu Dayün 吳達雲 “Zizhu yu chengquan: Lun Chen Ruoxi xiaoshuo zhong de nüxing yishi” 自主與成全：論陳若曦小說中的女性意識 (Independence and Fulfilment: Feminist Consciousness in Chen Ruoxi’s Fiction). *Wenxing* 文星 (Literary Star), February 1988.

2.3 Li Li: Life and Work

Li Li 李黎 was born Bao Lili 鮑利黎 in Nanjing, China in 1948. Her parents fled to Taiwan in 1949 and she grew up in the southern city of Kaohsiung, moving to Taipei as a student, where she received a bachelor's degree in history from National Taiwan University in 1969. The following year she went to the United States to study political science at Purdue University. She became heavily involved in the Diaoyutai movement and was blacklisted by the Nationalist government as a result: she did not return to the island until 1985, fifteen years after her departure. Li Li became a permanent resident in the United States, editing, teaching, and subsequently spending all her time writing and looking after her children in California, where her husband works as a scientist. The eldest of her three sons died suddenly in 1989. Between 1971 and 2000 Li Li published three novels and four collections comprising twenty-two short stories. She also authored five volumes of prose and essays, edited an anthology of overseas Chinese writing, and translated Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* into Chinese.

Lili's first short story, "A Day in the Life of Professor Tan" 譚教授的一天¹ was published in *Modern Literature* in 1971. Ten years younger than the founding members of the *Modern Literature* group, Lili had not been involved with the journal while a student, although she had admired it and had begun reading it at high school, when lucky enough to find copies. She sent her story from the United States to a teacher in Taipei, and recalls being particularly honoured that her story was published in that forum.² It was later chosen by Ouyang Zi for inclusion in an edited volume of selected fiction from *Modern Literature*.³ This is the link by which Li Li claims she manages, just, to count as a member of that early generation of writers centred around the journal, in spite of the fact that her fictional career was only established in the 1980s.⁴ The connection is strengthened through Chen Yingzhen's preface and Ouyang Zi's postscript to Li Li's first collection of short stories, published in 1986.

While not overtly autobiographical, the worlds depicted in Li Li's fiction reflect her own circumstances and experiences: the settings are those which Li Li knows and lives in, and the stories are presented against accurate historical accounts of the time in which the narratives are set. Below, Li Li's work is summarized in roughly chronological order of

¹ Under the pen name Li Yang 黎陽, *Modern Literature* Vol. 45 (December 1971): 209-225.

² Li Li, Preface to Li Li, *Chuxue* 初雪 (First Snow) (Taipei: Lianhe wenxue, 1998), 7.

³ Ouyang Zi ed., *Xiandai wenxue xiaoshuo xuanji* 現代文學小說選集 (Selected Fiction from *Xiandai wenxue*) Vol. 2, (Taipei: Erya, 1977), 459-482.

⁴ Li Li, "The Path of youth: *Xiandai wenxue* and me" in Li Li, *Biehou* (After Departure) (Taipei: Yongchen enhua gongsi, 1989), 91.

composition, under subheadings which reflect the character types and situations in which those characters find themselves: Mainlanders in Taiwan, Mainlanders in the United States, and subsequently travel between the United States and Taiwan. Stories written in the 1990s depict the experience of love and loss, and are followed by a science fiction novel.

2.3.1 The Mainlander experience in Taiwan

Four of Li Li's earliest stories are set in Taiwan of the 1960s or 1970s, presenting the experiences of a range of Mainlander protagonists: a professor, a schoolgirl, undergraduate students at National Taiwan University and an army colonel.

"A Day in the Life of Professor Tan,"⁵ loosely based on one of Li Li's university professors at National Taiwan University, depicts the disillusionment of an ageing literature professor from the mainland. Professor Tan no longer produces the sharply critical "new literature" he had been known for as a young man and despairs at the tortured existential tone of the fashionable Modernist fiction. He feels that jockeying for position and the pursuit of practical success have replaced idealism in terms of intellectual pursuits in Taiwan. The worst betrayal is when a former classmate from Beijing University denies the importance of the legacy of their mentor from the mainland. This colleague has achieved success through political machinations at the expense of old loyalties. Professor Tan, who has not made moral compromises, finds himself with no important role and little respect. He is too old to conceive of a future outside of the island: his children are all in the United States, and his eldest son writes advising his father to retire, telling him that America is a "young professor's world."

While the potential of the older generation is generally shown to have been compromised by the impact of the civil war and the subsequent uprooting, the environment of post-war Taiwan is presented as equally inimical to the hopes of a younger generation of Mainlanders. Du Juzhou, the protagonist of Li Li's second story, "Night Tree" 夜樹,⁶ is a young girl growing up in a large family living in poverty on a government military compound. Hating the squalor of her home life, the drinking, gambling and regular beatings, Juzhou has aspirations beyond her situation and has insisted on attending high school. The wider environment that she is growing up in, however, augurs poorly. Juzhou's history teacher has recently disappeared, a probable political kidnapping: he had been open about his contempt for the path that Chinese history had taken after the revolution. Juzhou runs

⁵ Li Li's first collection was published under the pen name Xue Li 薛荔 [Li Li]. "Tan jiaoshou de yitian" 譚教授的一天 (A Day in the Life of Professor Tan), *Zuihou yechē* 最後夜車 (The Last Night Train) (Taipei: Hongfan shudian, 1986).

away from home one night and is given refuge by the old school caretaker. His tragic story of enforced conscription, a lost family on the mainland, dislocation and homelessness, puts her own plight to shame. However, when her worried family finds Juzhou in Old Wei's shack, he stands accused of lechery. Juzhou dreams of his being beaten, his blood spattering over the young trees in the school grounds.

The pessimism of "Night Trees" is reinforced in "The great wind blows" 大風吹,⁷ which describes in much more detail the chilling political climate that existed in Taiwan throughout the 1950s to 1970s. Xubin, a second-year class representative, does not find the routine political vetting of the student publication he edits particularly insidious, but he is also instructed to monitor his fellow students, such as the Indonesian Chinese student, Xu Kunlun, who had lived in mainland China before fleeing to Taiwan following the start of the Cultural Revolution. Xubin experiences minor setbacks during the year the story covers: he is undemocratically usurped as class representative, so that a KMT youth party member can stand as head of the student association.⁸ Kunlun, however, increasingly exhibits symptoms of what initially appears to be a paranoid mental illness. It becomes apparent retrospectively that his mental distress is in fact well founded: he has been resisting attempts to co-opt him into speaking out against the communist "bandits;" a resistance for which a fellow refugee of just sixteen years of age had been imprisoned. Kunlun was indeed being closely watched by any number of government informants: one of his classmates is later granted an honorary position in the Chinese Anticommunist National Salvation Youth Corps.⁹ Kunlun makes two abortive attempts to escape his predicament, through suicide and by fleeing the island, but by the end of the story his resistance to becoming a tool of the Nationalist's propaganda regime is shown to have been crushed.

Li Li's final story set in Taiwan prior to the lifting of martial law is a short, surreal piece which serves as an allegory of the backward-looking mentality of the island's military rulers. The troops on display in "Grand Ceremony" 大典¹⁰ are duped into saluting a ninety year-old former general who has escaped from a retirement home, repeating after him chanted slogans of loyalty to a long dead leader (unnamed, but presumably Sun Yat-sen).

⁶ Xue Li [Li Li], "Yeshu" 夜樹 (Night Tree), *The Last Night Train*, 35-76. First drafted 1976, revised 1979.

⁷ Li Li, "Da feng chui" 大風吹 (The great wind blows), *Fushi* 浮世 (The Floating World) (Hongfan shudian, 1991), 191-234. Written August 1978, first published in *Qishi niandai* (The Seventies), January 1979.

⁸ Membership of the KMT grew from approximately 100,000 to 1 million between 1950 and the end of the 1960s, and was a key to connections and success, for both Mainlanders and Taiwanese. Roy, *Taiwan: A Political History*, 81.

⁹ This organisation, a counterpart to the military commissar system for universities, trained students to report suspicious activities while indoctrinating them in KMT values. Roy, *Taiwan: A Political History*, 88-94.

¹⁰ Li Li, "Da dian" 大典 (Grand Ceremony), *Tiantang niaohua* 天堂鳥花 (Birds of Paradise Flowers) (Taipei: Hongfan shudian, 1988), 1-24. Written April 1980, revised June 1986.

The irony is that the case of usurped identity is of no real consequence: the regime is living in the past, and aside from the name of the new leader, the slogans and policies are all still the same.

These early stories all suggest a pervading sense of physical and psychological restriction and isolation in Taiwan, resulting from both the political situation and the relative poverty of the island in the first few decades of Nationalist rule.

Taiwan of the 1980s is presented very differently in a story published in 1988, written after Li Li had returned to the island after a fifteen-year absence. "Dream Lens" 夢境¹¹ is the story of two entrepreneurial friends who grew up together on a military compound. The two launch a company which makes short films catering to dreams, memories and fantasies: clients either star in the features, or have themselves portrayed re-living past events or creating alternative scenarios of wish-fulfilment. Fast-paced and full of characters, the story paints a picture of a vibrant society where life is competitive and harsh but where opportunities and ambition abound. The narrator makes good, but his partner commits suicide after becoming the victim of his own fantasies: he bankrupts the company in an attempt to launch himself as a movie star.

2.3.2 Mainlanders abroad: divided families, divided selves

"Moon Over West River 西江月,"¹² one of Li Li's earliest stories set outside Taiwan, takes up a theme which runs throughout Li Li's work of the 1980s: the impact of a divided China on the lives of Chinese from both Taiwan and the mainland, and the search for meaning and identity for overseas Chinese living in the United States. The protagonist's father, a famous KMT general, dies in California still yearning for the China of his past. His son feels helpless and trapped, belonging nowhere. The family is spread over three continents: the general's eldest daughter has remained in mainland China, the youngest lives in Britain, and he and his two sons are on the west coast of the United States.

"Homeward Bound" 近鄉¹³ and "Spring Hope" 春望 depict the journeys of two family men as they travel to the mainland to be reunited with relations they had left behind during the civil war. The protagonist of "Homeward Bound," a university professor, travels from the United States to Canton. The journey gives him occasion to reflect on the emptiness of his comfortable life in the United States, and the regret and yearning that he

¹¹ Li Li, "Mengjing" 夢境 (Dream Lens), *The Floating World*, 87-131. First published in *China Times*, 10-15 June 1988.

¹² Xue Li [Li Li], "Xijiang yue" 西江月 (Moon Over West River), *The Last Night Train*, 101-128. Written July 1978.

¹³ Li Li, "Jinxiang" 近鄉 (Homeward Bound), *Birds of Paradise Flowers*, 25-68. Written February 1981, revised

still feels when he considers his homeland. Married to a Chinese American, he has recently developed a passionate crush on a young Taiwanese student who shares his feelings for the homeland. She has now returned to Taiwan, rather than live as he does, cut off from the home culture. The protagonist feels trapped in his comfortable lifestyle in the United States, but does not have the courage to break free.

“Spring Hope”¹⁴ tells the story of an older man, a 70-year old paediatrician from Taiwan, who travels to Hong Kong to meet the two children he had left behind on the mainland when they were very young. The doctor had remarried in Taiwan and has two daughters and a son by his Taiwanese wife as well as two foster children whom he had taken in when their parents were detained by security police on the island. Four of these children now live in the United States. While depicting acutely the guilt and sense of loss engendered by the prolonged separation of the family, the story highlights the positive: this meeting will be the first of many.

“Birds of Paradise Flowers” 天堂鳥花¹⁵ continues the theme of a family divided by the war but is told from the perspective of an American-born child. He observes his ailing grandmother during the brief visit of her husband from the mainland, from whom she had been separated over thirty years previously. She has brought up her son alone in Taiwan and now lives with his family in the US, but her husband has a second family on the mainland. The incomplete understanding of the child narrator and his naive questions about his grandparents’ situation highlight both the poignancy of their situation and the generation gap. The American-born child cannot understand his grandparents’ language or relate to their experiences. The old couple have been emotionally deadened by their experiences.

“Snow Fields” 雪地¹⁶ depicts internal rather than external family divisions, from the perspective of a Taiwanese and a Chinese woman who are both under pressure to terminate a pregnancy. Their different stories are told by means of short intertwined segments which depict their shared dilemma. For the Taiwanese overseas student in the United States, a second child would be an inconvenience for both her and her husband. For the citizen of the PRC, a second child is forbidden under the one-child policy. The Taiwanese woman, whose young son is being cared for by in-laws in Taiwan, has an abortion. It is intimated that the woman in the PRC will either be compelled to have an

June 1986.

¹⁴ Xue Li [Li Li], “Chun wang” 春望 (Spring Hope), *The Last Night Train*, 213-244. Written March 1986.

¹⁵ Li Li, “Tiantang Niaohua” 天堂鳥花 (Birds of Paradise Flowers), *Birds of Paradise Flowers*, 99-128. Written 1986.

¹⁶ Xue Li [Li Li], “Xue di” 雪地 (Snow Fields), *The Last Night Train*, 193-212.

abortion, or that her family might murder her young daughter in order to gain permission for the birth of this child, which they believe may be a boy.

“The Last Train” 最後夜車¹⁷ is told from the perspective of a recent immigrant to the United States from the PRC. He is of the generation born since the war and his family has not been split, but the Cultural Revolution has cut him off from happy identification with his past: he is tormented with piercing headaches caused by semi-repressed memories of the wanton destruction he was involved in during that period. His loneliness in New York is eased when he meets a Taiwanese girl. He plans to follow her to the West Coast, but is stabbed and killed on the New York Metro as he attempts to save a compatriot from being mugged. His death is portrayed as a redemptive: the face of the woman whose life he saves mirrors that of one of his victims during his time as a Red Guard.

“The Floating Exiles” 漂泊者¹⁸ represents Li Li’s first attempt at allegorical writing. Four surreal vignettes, entitled “The ice-carver”, “The relative-seeker”, “The performance artist” and “The drifters” all depict journeys by displaced individuals. War forces the ice carver from northern China to move to the warmer south, where ice, the material which gives his life meaning, is no longer available. He fails in his attempts to create magical forms from other materials. The seeker is a young man travelling through what appears to be an illusory ancient Chinese landscape: he has died and is being escorted by a monk and a Daoist priest to the end of the earth to give thanks to his creator and merge into nothingness. The traditional performance artist manipulates his two life-sized half-puppets in their vicious battle with increasing fervour, even as winter draws in and his audience diminishes, until he stabs himself to death in the frenzy of his performance. The drifters are four men trapped in the future, having got lost in time tunnels. Only one of them takes the dangerous route back into the early twentieth-century past from which all four originated: his friends discover that his fate was heroic sacrifice to the Chinese revolution. The short pieces are explorations of the exiled and self-exiled Chinese in diaspora: particularly the artist or intellectual, separated from the homeland and its language, facing diminishing audiences, coping with internal battles and always conscious of the pressure to sacrifice oneself for one’s country.

¹⁷ Xue Li [Li Li], “Zui hou yechē” 最後夜車 (The Last Train), *The Last Night Train*, 129-164.

¹⁸ Li Li, “Piaobozhe” 漂泊者 (The Floating Exiles), *Birds of Paradise Flowers*, 129-151. Written January 1987.

2.3.3 Chinese in America

Li Li's first story set in the United States, "Wedding Banquet" 喜宴,¹⁹ is a rather bitter reflection on Taiwan society in the United States, narrated from the perspective of a new arrival. He attends the wedding reception of a recently divorced colleague from Taiwan who has become a professor, taken up US citizenship, and flown in a new young bride from home. Some of the wedding guests are unpleasant gossips, others loud and domineering. It is presumed that the bride is marrying primarily for a green card, and there are indications that the groom had not his first wife well. There is a clash of cultural sensitivities when an American guest tries to kiss the bride.

"The Lost Dragon" 失去的龍²⁰ is a more subtle reflection on the problems of adjustment to American life, told by way of dialogue between a father and his young son on a Saturday outing. Although the boy lives with his Taiwanese mother, he speaks mainly English at home, and his father worries that because his mother works, she doesn't care for him well enough. The story highlights the concerns of overseas Chinese regarding bringing up their children in the West, the impact of work on family life, and the strain that divorce puts on a young child. The title, an allusion to the long-extinct dinosaurs which are the young boy's passion, symbolise the fear that Chinese identity, like the dinosaurs, may not be able to adapt to a new, modern world.

"The Floating World" 浮世,²¹ written ten years after "Homeward Bound," features the same character-type as that early story: a professor of Chinese history who has a successful career at a good university in the United States, but who feels dislocated and lost and who embarks on an affair with a young Taiwanese student. The idealistic spirit of the May Fourth movement is alien to the protagonist's Chinese students, who seem to have no sense of history. While the protagonist of "Homeward Bound" is comforted by a re-established connection to relatives on the mainland, this protagonist of this story has no such route: the story is set during the Tiananmen Incident of 1989, in which China's negative history seems to be repeating itself. Some of his students become politically mobilised, but suicide of his young girlfriend's best friend in response to the massacre marks the end of the affair and an end to the protagonist's hope of ever decreasing the distance between himself and his homeland.

¹⁹ Xue Li [Li Li], "Xian" 喜宴 (Wedding Banquet), *The Last Night Train*, 77-100.

²⁰ Li Li "Shiqu de long" 失去的龍 (The Lost Dragon), *The Last Night Train*, 165-193.

²¹ Li Li, "Fushi" 浮世 (*The Floating World*), 147-190.

"The Jews of Kaifeng City" 開封城的猶太人²² shows a Taiwanese divorcee embracing a future in the United States through her marriage to a Jewish American. Her first husband had returned to Taiwan and married a Taiwanese woman with whom he had possibly been having an affair during their marriage. She had remained in California, and enjoyed a brief affair with a married man from the People's Republic before meeting her current fiancé. The protagonist learns from both her Chinese lover and her prospective father-in-law that there are descendants of Jews in Henan, and that traces of a long Jewish tradition are still evident in Kaifeng city. As her own grandmother was from Henan, she allows herself to imagine a link between herself and the Jewish American family she is marrying into.

Two long short stories and one novel make up Li Li's three-part "city series" of the 1980s, which depict male protagonists moving back and forward between Taipei and Los Angeles.²³ "Under the city" 城下²⁴ is told from the perspective of a Los Angeles-based university professor from Taiwan, a confirmed bachelor of forty who has modelled himself consciously on the protagonist of Qian Zhongshu's *Fortress Besieged*.²⁵ He laments the capitulation of his close friends in Taipei who have succumbed to marriage, but finds himself, too, suddenly smitten when he meets an attractive, independent businesswoman from Taiwan. After a drunken evening in Los Angeles, he wakes to find himself in her hotel room. He has no recollection of the events of the evening, so when he hears from her a few months later, and she tells him she is pregnant, he assumes it must be his child. He flies back to Taiwan to propose a hasty marriage for the sake of old-fashioned decency but is amazed by her nonchalance: she playfully refuses to confirm or deny whether or not they had in fact slept together or to take seriously his proposal of marriage. He is captivated, and the story closes with a complete turnabout in his philosophy: he is determined to win the hand of this woman.

The narrative perspective of "Two cities" 雙城²⁶ is divided between a Taiwanese husband and wife, who have lived in Los Angeles for over ten years. He is a scientist, and has just travelled back to Taiwan for the first time, lecturing at his alma mater while on a

²² Li Li, "Kaifengcheng de youtairen" 開封城的猶太人 (The Jews of Kaifeng City), *Birds of Paradise Flowers*, 69-98.

²³ Li Li, "The eternal city: in lieu of a preface," *Qingcheng 傾城* (The Fall of a City) (Taipei: Lianjing chuban gongsi, 1989).

²⁴ "Chengxia" 城下 (Under the city), *Birds of Paradise Flowers*, 153-207.

²⁵ A famous Chinese comedy of manners, published 1947. Ch'ien Chung-shu [Qian Zhongshu], *Fortress Besieged*, translated by Jeanne Kelly and Nathan K Mao (Indiana University Press: Bloomington and London, 1979). The protagonist bases his philosophy on the French proverb: "Marriage is like a fortress besieged: those who are outside want to get in, and those who are inside want to get out."

²⁶ Li Li, "Shuang cheng" 雙城 [Two cities], *The Floating World*, 1-86.

short sabbatical. He encounters an ex-girlfriend from his youth and begins an affair: she is divorced, and her husband has custody of her child. The protagonist's wife discovers the affair, but chooses not to confront the issue until the Taiwanese woman also moves to Los Angeles. Only then does she take action: she goes to visit the other woman, requesting in a very civil fashion that she end the affair. The two women bond as they discuss their children, and the wife sets the Taiwanese divorcee up with an eligible man in Los Angeles.

A minor earthquake opens *The Fall of a City* 傾城,²⁷ symbolising the shaky state of the relationship of a married couple from Taiwan. The novella is divided into five parts, narrated from the perspectives of the wife, the husband, their thirteen year-old daughter, the wife's elderly Mainlander father, and a Chinese American man with whom the wife almost begins an affair. Each presents a different perspective on life in the United States. The older generation find it hard to adapt, live in a very closed Taiwanese community and yearn for the past. The next generation is beginning to settle in the United States, but is worried about the Americanisation of its children and is subject to the pressures of modern life: work versus family commitments, stale marriages, and attraction to other people. The husband is having an affair with a Japanese American woman. The youngest generation is fully at home in America, but longs to conform: the daughter is embarrassed by her parents' imperfect English and their old-fashioned attitudes to dating. The Chinese American man is likewise fully adapted to life America, but he is proud of his cultural difference. Self-satisfied and self-confident, he displays a sense of superiority over white Americans.

The "city series" represents a culmination of Li Li's writing about overseas Chinese in America. Early problems of adaptation fade as the new generation settles in the United States: there is increasingly a diaspora identity rather than an exile mentality, and Taiwan and China are no longer simply representative of the past. Hope for the PRC is faint, but characters travel easily and regularly between Taiwan and America. They marvel and worry at the development of their home island, and acknowledge that the impact of modernisation is changing both themselves and their home culture: there becomes less of a perceived dichotomy between the United States and Taiwan. Characters increasingly feel less torn and nostalgic.

²⁷ *Qingcheng* 傾城 (*The Fall of a City*) (Taipei: Lianjing chuban gongsi, 1989). The story won the 10th *Lienhebao* (United Daily News) prize for shorter fiction in 1988.

2.3.4 Love and loss

Two volumes of letters and essays document the process of grieving that Li Li went through after her teenage son died as the result of an undiagnosed heart condition in 1989.²⁸ Li Li's subsequent fiction displays a marked change in theme and style: the themes of this period are of loss, loneliness, illness and coming to terms with the past. There is no specifically Chinese consciousness in the narratives.

"Four aspects of love" 愛情四篇²⁹ presents four vignettes: on disappointment, inconstancy, self-deception and the passage of time. In "The Mirror," a dissatisfied wife remembers the independence and fun of her single life, and imagines she sees her old boyfriend as she eats with her husband in a restaurant she used to frequent in that former life. In "The Lover" a woman is enchanted by the voice of her optician. She falls in love with him in the dark, but when the lights return and she leaves his establishment, she no longer remembers nor cares what he looks like. "The Beggar" seeks provisions, not money, and all his needs are satisfied until he falls in love with a woman who tells him he can't obtain her love with begging. He leaves town and is seen no more. In "A Date" a young woman waits outside a coffee shop for her lover, who has promised to come bearing gifts. She hopes for a pearl necklace. During her wait, she ages a lifetime: his haggard face repels her when he arrives, until she catches sight of her own sparse grey hair and lined face in the shop window.

Predominantly restricted to the perceptions of the male protagonist, "First Snow" 初雪³⁰ describes the process of grieving and recovery of a bereaved husband. The narrative presents a new relationship as the key to renewed enjoyment of life and hope for the future. Initially, the protagonist still regularly feels the presence of his wife and communicates with her, although he knows these conversations must be figments of his imagination. His new girlfriend's unemotional, detached take on life, shaped by her love of murder mysteries, gives him a new perspective on suffering: he realises that a tragedy for one person might be comedy for another. A realisation that his suffering is not unique helps him overcome his misery. In the final scene, he makes love to his girlfriend while the first snow of the season falls outside. Full of peace, he sees the spirit of his wife walking away from him for the last time, hand in hand with his old self: he is reconciled to her becoming a memory, while his own life goes on without her.

²⁸ Li Li, *Beihuai shujian* (Letters of Sorrow) (Taipei: Erya chubanshe, 1990). Li Li, *Qingtian biji* (Notes on a Fine Day) (Taipei: Lianhe wenxue, 1996).

²⁹ "Aiqing sipian" 愛情四篇 (Four aspects of love), in Li Li, *Fushi* (The Floating World and Other Stories) (Hongfan shudian, 1991), 133-140. First published July 1990 in Hong Kong Mingbao fukan.

³⁰ "Chuxue" 初雪 (First Snow), in Li Li, *First Snow*, 205-223.

In the very short piece “Chess” 棋局³¹ two old men in heaven are obliged to interrupt their regular chess match when one of them is called for a brief shift of work: their job involves taking on a human life. Each has to take two loads down to earth: one representing pain and suffering, one representing joy and happiness. As a single day in heaven represents twenty years on earth, the narrator is careless about ensuring that his load is balanced: he doesn’t mind that he is rather overweight on suffering. On his return after three days he jokes that his companion has had plenty of time to consider his next chess move. It transpires, however, that his companion has also just returned from a job, although it was exceptionally short: “I went down to be your eldest son – eighteen years.” A wry perspective on human suffering, the story achieves poignancy without sentimentality.

“Picnic” 野宴³² plays with a similar perspective of time: a day’s picnic excursion becomes a metaphor for a whole life. The protagonist sets off through the woods as a young man; meets his wife on the way; is joined by his two children, whom he has to help cross a stream, but they abandon him to go off with their own families after lunch. His wife tires and falls by the way on the walk home, until he too tires and lies down in the woods to die, the picnic basket rotting beside him.

Letters from a Floating World 浮世書簡³³ is a sentimental epistolary novella comprising eighteen letters written by the first person female narrator to the man who had been her first love in Taiwan, twenty years ago. They had planned to marry on his return from postgraduate studies in the United States, but he reneged on his promise to come back for her. She secretly terminated a pregnancy just after he left, in order not to burden him, and found herself unable to conceive again once she married: she suspects her infertility was one of the reasons behind the failure of her marriage. Having been diagnosed with breast cancer, she travels to California to see him before she dies. She finds that he too has experienced great sadness: he and his wife had lost their daughter three years ago. They enjoy a revival of their old love, but she decides to go back to Taiwan so as not to break up his marriage. On her return, she finds out that she is pregnant. The doctor tells her that a pregnancy will increase the chances of her cancer progressing, but she is overjoyed at the thought of carrying her lover’s child. He tells her not to make any decisions alone this time: the novella ends as she waits for him to fly to Taiwan for them to make the decision about whether or not to continue with the pregnancy.

³¹ “Qiju” 棋局 (Chess), in Li Li, *First Snow*, 224-227. First published Lianhewenxue No 93, July 1992.

³² “Yean” 野宴 (Picnic), Li Li, *The Floating World*, 141-146. First published August 1990 Lianhe wenxue.

³³ Li Li, *Fushi shujian* 浮世書簡 (*Letters from a Floating World*) (Lianhe wenxue, 1994).

2.3.5 Science Fiction

Kangaroo Man 袋鼠男人³⁴ is Li Li's best known work, which was made into a film in Taiwan two years after it first appeared.³⁵ It tells the story of a Chinese scientist in California whose wife has had a hysterectomy. He is an expert in cell growth and tissue replacement, and has a female American friend who is a gynaecologist.³⁶ Experimenting with human life is forbidden under the ethical code of their institution, so the two have to employ subterfuge as they apply their expertise to creating an artificial uterus, implanting it into the man, and introducing a male embryo created by in-vitro fertilisation. The protagonist's wife plays supporting role, and there is some discussion of the difficulty the pair have in adapting their gender roles to cater for a pregnant husband. The experiment is a success, a baby is born, and the two doctors triumph over the conservative establishment: a Nobel Prize may be in their sights.

2.3.6 Critical Reception

Very little critical attention has been directed at Li Li's work, in Taiwan or abroad. There are a number of brief book reviews of *The Last Train* and of *Kangaroo Man*, but the only substantial articles in Chinese appear as prefaces or appendices to her first two collections. In his introduction to *The Last Train*, Chen Yingzhen congratulates Li Li on producing fiction that reflects the impact of the Diaoyutai movement on overseas Chinese: he expresses admiration for her treatment of the larger questions surrounding the political, military and social situation of Taiwan and the mainland.³⁷ Ouyang Zi's appendix to the same collection, reprinted from her newspaper review of "The Lost Dragon," states: "I don't know who this Xue Li is, but have been have been surprised by his [sic] literary talent, and praise him to the skies. I hope that everyone who hasn't yet read it will rush out [to get the story] . . . The salvation and redemption of mankind might just be found in it."³⁸ In the

³⁴ *Daishu nanren* 袋鼠男人 (*Kangaroo Man*) (Taipei: Lianjing chuban gongsi, 1992).

³⁵ *Daishu nanren* 袋鼠男人 [*Kangaroo Man*] 1994. Directed by Yee Ming Lau. The book and film bear very close resemblance to the film *Junior* (Universal Studios, San Francisco, 1994), directed by Ivan Reitman, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, Danny DeVito and Emma Thompson. I have heard anecdotally that Li Li had tried to sell the film rights in California, and that there was some suspicion that her idea had been used without acknowledgement. *Kangaroo Man* is generally the only work by Li Li with which my informants in Taiwan in 1999 were familiar: most knew the names of Ouyang Zi and Chen Ruoxi but could not recall having heard of Li Li until prompted with the name of this novel.

³⁶ Li Li states in her preface to the novel that the topic was her husband's idea: he is a reproductive scientist in California. Li Li "The bag is artificial, but the thing inside it is real," Preface to *Kangaroo Man*, 1.

³⁷ Chen Yingzhen, 鈞運的風化與愁結 "Diaoyun de fenghua yu choujie: du Xue Li xiaoshuo ji Zuihou yeché suixiang" (Dissolution of the Diaoyutai movement and its emotional complex: thoughts on reading Xue Li's *The Last Night Train*), Xue Li [Li Li], *The Last Night Train*, 1-12.

³⁸ Ouyang Zi, 人性的救贖 - 評介失去的龍 "Renxing de jiushu - pingjie 'Shiqu de long'" (The salvation and redemption of mankind: on "The Lost Dragon"), *The Last Night Train*, 245-263. First published 13-16 March 1986 in Lienhebao.

introduction to *Birds of Paradise Flowers*, Liu Binyan, a mainland Chinese critic, expresses surprise at the depth that Li Li has continued to bring to her work, in spite of being cut off from Taiwan and the mainland: he generally feels that overseas Chinese do not have much to offer home audiences but finds genuine relevance in her work.³⁹

The only critical work on Li Li's fiction in English is an essay by Michelle Yeh which looks at the theme of the divided self in Li Li's first two collections of short stories. The editors put Li Li alongside Chen Ruoxi and three other women writers, selected as being representative of overseas Chinese writers who have remained identified with Chinese culture. Yeh states that Li Li "rightfully deserves her high stature among other remarkably accomplished contemporary Chinese writers."⁴⁰

This thesis will therefore be the first to address critically the work written since those first two collections, and to provide a gendered analysis of Li Li's oeuvre.

³⁹ Liu Binyan 劉賓雁 "Li Li, ta buduan chaoyue ziji" 李黎，她不斷超越自己 [Li Li, she constantly surpasses herself], Introduction, *Birds of Paradise Flowers*, 1-8.

⁴⁰ Michelle Yeh, "The Divided Self and the Search for Redemption: A Study of Li Li's Fiction," Hsin-sheng C. Kao, ed., *Nativism Overseas: Contemporary Chinese Women Writers*. (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 187-206. Yeh has translated a number of Li Li's stories, detailed in the bibliography.

Chapter 3: Sexuality

Sexuality is a fundamental political issue for feminists: “historically enormous efforts, from chastity belts to property laws, have been made to control female sexuality and to tie women to individual men through monogamous heterosexual relationships.”¹ Early Western activists challenged some aspects of the policing and regulation of female sexuality and the double standard of morality that allowed men greater sexual freedoms than women, but were constrained by material circumstances – economic dependence, children, and prevailing sexual morality – from demanding much more than that men should themselves observe greater chastity. During the 1960s and 1970s the counter-cultural movement, the increased availability of contraception and abortion and the greater economic independence of women contributed to the “sexual revolution” which gave both men and women greater freedom to talk about sexuality and to seek out sexual pleasure. Feminists who “politicised the personal” began to question assumptions about passive female sexuality and the structure of male-dominated heterosexual relationships. The realisation that sexuality was differently conceived in different cultural and historical contexts was a starting point for counter-arguments to biological determinism.

The sexological tradition that developed in Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century increasingly replaced religious and moral regulation of sexual acts with medical and biological investigations of sex and desire. The psychiatrization of sex brought about a new theoretical construction: “sexuality,” which associated the individual with the object of desire, creating new sexual identities and labels such as the homosexual, the nymphomaniac, etc. Freud’s theory of psychosexual development has been immensely influential in establishing perceptions of sexuality as an innate inner sexual drive, which is then repressed and regulated. Women’s sexuality is described as passive and masochistic, shaped by penis envy. Foucault’s 1979 intervention, the *History of Sexuality*,² has largely overturned the repressive hypothesis within academia. Foucault describes sexuality in terms of regulatory discourses: sex is not an innate drive, but a dense transfer point for relations of power. It is not only regulated, through proscription and prohibition, but *produced*, through prescription and incitement. Outside of academic discourses, however, it is still a commonly held belief that sexuality is an innate and instinctive urge, that it was most heavily repressed during the

¹ For an account of the diversity of feminist perspectives on sexuality beginning with ‘second wave feminism’ in the West during the late 1960s and 1970s see “Sexual Skirmishes and Feminist Factions: Twenty-five years of debate on women and sexuality” in Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott, eds. *Feminism and Sexuality: A Reader*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996) (here 3).

² Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction* (London: Penguin, 1990).

Victorian era, and that it is being “liberated” from repressive constraints as sexual mores become more permissive. While some view this as a positive development, others fear what is perceived as the latent uncontrollability of sex.³

The “liberation” of sex that has accompanied modernisation has loosened the some of the legal and social regulations on sex and includes the tolerance of a greater range of sexual expression, but it is still constructed by and operates within normative regulatory discourses. The positive promotion of sexual desire has “entrenched more deeply genitally organised heterosexuality as the norm, while erotic alternatives, though viewed more benignly, have retained their marginal status.”⁴ Commodified sex is omnipresent, but sex is still perceived as dangerous and not for everyone, particularly young people, as exemplified in debates about sex education and the provision of contraception. The dominant discourse is still one which casts men as the active pursuers of sexual activity and women as passive recipients of male advances: men are possessed of uncontrollable urges, which women must paradoxically both respond to, and restrain.

My approach to the study of sexuality in the texts under discussion is informed by Foucaultian and feminist interpretations which see sex and sexuality as socially and culturally constructed rather than biological or psychological phenomena.⁵ Sexuality is understood to encompass such disparate elements as the images and fantasies of a desiring subject, the anticipation, deferment and realisation of sexual acts, aesthetics of the body, sensuality, and frissons built upon lines of power, of difference or of objectification. Between individuals and across cultures the complexities multiply, although many elements of both Western and non-Western modern sexual discourses have been formed and informed through cultural crossings, overlaps, confrontations or integrations.⁶

Two recent studies on gender and sexuality in China testify to modernising discourses that share much with the Western experience and draw on Western sources, but which are at the same time situated in and framed by specifically Chinese historical concepts

³ For presentation of and a critique on Freud’s conception of female sexuality, see Sarah Kofman, *The Enigma of Woman: Woman in Freud’s Writings* translated by Catherine Porter (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985).

⁴ Gail Hawkes, *A Sociology of Sex and Sexuality* (Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1996), 3.

⁵ See Carol S Vance, ed. *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984) and Pat Caplan eds., *The Cultural Construction of Sexuality* (London and New York: Tavistock Publications, 1987).

⁶ See the introductory essay in Lenore Manderson and Margaret Jolly, eds., *Sites of Desire, Economies of Pleasure: Sexualities in Asia and the Pacific* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997). Exploring the erotic in cross-cultural experience is the theme of the fiction anthology Geraldine Kudaka ed., *On a Bed of Rice: An Asian American Erotic Feast* (New York: Anchor Books, 1995).

and discourses about women and gender.⁷ Both Evans and Dikötter describe the influence of scientific and medical discourses developed in early nineteenth century Europe, which tended to explain conventional gender characteristics in terms of biological sex differences and to understand sexual desire as a powerful natural drive. Dikötter, however, maintains one important distinction: he argues that there is no equivalent to the Western term “sexuality” in Republican discursive formulations, in that sexual desire was not seen as conferring any rights to pleasure upon individuals. “Modernising discourses in China continued to focus on procreative acts in relation to fertility, not on sexual preferences as expressions of individual variation.”⁸ No attempt is made in these works, or my own, to link the present study directly with the rich discourses on sex and sexuality of ancient China, given the effective erasure of these materials from circulation in contemporary China.⁹

The strong interest in Western thought manifested by the *Modern Literature* group and the fact that many of them were students of foreign languages and literatures, translating Freud, Virginia Woolf and D H Lawrence, testifies to common experiences and understandings that facilitate a Western feminist reading of their literary texts. My reading of sexuality in the fiction is descriptive and not prescriptive: I do not seek to categorize the discursive practices of the authors, but simply to identify traces of discourses that they speak within, or speak to. In this chapter, the investigation of literary portrayals of sexuality is used to explore the production of meanings around female sexuality for its Taiwan readers, according the literature its own role as an influential cultural practice, involved in structuring and reproducing as well as commenting on or contesting cultural perceptions, values, and norms.

3.1 Adolescence in 1960s Taiwan

Interest in sex is a common theme in the earliest work of the writers of this study. Two of the very first stories written by Li Li and Ouyang Zi depict children’s early experience of social taboos involving sex. The schoolboy in Ouyang Zi’s “Xiaonan’s Diary”¹⁰ is taken to a brothel by a friend to be shown that it is possible for an unmarried woman to have a baby: he sees a row of tired-looking, gaudily made-up women, one suckling a child. Still sceptical, he asks his parents to confirm his friend’s revelation, but his father asserts

⁷ Frank Dikötter, *Sex, Culture and Modernity in China: Medical Science and the Construction of Sexual Identities in the Early Republican Period* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995) and Harriet Evans, *Women and Sexuality in China: Female Sexuality and Gender since 1949* (New York: Continuum, 1997).

⁸ Dikötter, *Sex, Culture and Modernity*, 69.

⁹ See the preface to R H Van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China* (Leiden: E J Brill, 1974).

that it is impossible for a single woman to be a mother. When his parents realise that he has witnessed prostitutes at work, he is beaten and ordered never again to visit such 'dirty' places. The schoolgirl in Li Li's "Night Tree"¹¹ is disturbed and excited by sexual graffiti on the walls of the school toilet. A friend tells her that middle-aged men are often perverts, and that she should be careful of the school janitor (44-46); her own fears become sexualised on the evening she runs away from home: "What if a ghost suddenly appears . . . no, what if a person jumps out, and grabs hold of her . . . what if that person does that thing to her that the society section of the newspaper often reports..." (53-54) Society is shown to have the same fears and make the same assumptions: when she is found sheltering with the janitor he is taken to court and the newspaper reports a "young girl's narrow escape from lewd assault", although he had done her no harm. (76) While sexual graffiti and fear of rape are thus part of the girl's knowledge, sex within relationships is not: she has no interest in the boys in her school, who seem uncouth, shaven-headed animals that she cannot associate with the love depicted in romantic novels. (47) When she develops a crush on her history teacher, it is experienced in terms of pity for him and a wish to escape her home life rather than desire for him. (47-48, 54). Both stories testify to the ubiquity of sex and sexual taboos in society (a topic of playground discussion and newspaper headlines) but also indicate the repression of knowledge about sex. The social environment depicted is one in which parents refuse to engage in discussion of anything to do with sex or reproduction, and in which a child perceives an insurmountable gulf between romance and the physical expression of love. Sex is restricted to the realm of prostitution and perversion.

In depictions of university students who are beginning to experience sexual feelings themselves, direct expression of subjective desire is often partially sublimated or disguised by being channelled into socially acceptable roles: the young women imagine themselves as wives of, or bearers of children for, the desired partner. The vulnerability entailed in revealing a desiring self and exposing oneself to rejection is the subject of stories by both Chen Ruoxi and Ouyang Zi. In Chen Ruoxi's "Appointment"¹² the young narrator begins to think about her wedding while waiting for her first date: "But, marriage! How embarrassing it was to think about it! I closed my eyes and felt the roots of my ears burning hot." (33) When it becomes clear she has been stood up, the shadow of the boy's absence is overwhelming: "expanding to enclose me; it was a big net spread wide and I was caught in it. I floundered and I strove. But I could not escape. In despair I started to jeer at my own

¹⁰ Ouyang Zi, "Xiaonan de riji" 小南的日記 (Xiaonan's Diary), *The Girl with Long Hair*, 8-10.

¹¹ Bi Li [Li Li], "Yeshu" 夜樹 [Night Tree], *The Last Night Train*, 35-76.

¹² Chen Ruoxi, "Appointment," *Spirit Calling*, 36.

foolishness. Cheap, wasn't it! Now you have lost all your dignity, I scolded. And in all my self-condemnation, I did not think to hate him. This made me despise myself more." (36). Having lost all hope subsequent to this rejection, the protagonist passively agrees to an arranged marriage rather than aspire to another romantic relationship, allowing herself to be presented as the type of girl who had never had a boyfriend or a will of her own.

After discovering that she had been invited on a date for a dare, the narrator of Ouyang Zi's "Wooden Beauty"¹³ resolves never to date again, castigating herself for having been so weak as to accept the invitation. She confesses to having being attracted to the boy's beautiful eyes, telling the reader: "Believe it or not, from the very first time I saw him I had a bizarre sort of desire: I wanted to bear a child for him." (68). The protagonist of Ouyang Zi's "Half a Smile"¹⁴ had also been attracted to her classmate at first sight: his existence filled her with an "irrepressible impulse" to escape the shackles of her role as model student. (12) She believes she has achieved this breakthrough having responded passionately to his sudden embrace: that she has a new identity as a "frivolous, reckless, shameless girl, who hangs on boys' necks." (20) Although she had longed for this transformation, the vulnerability of exposing herself as a desiring subject is terrifying. She discovers that he was only trying to prevent her from falling when he had grabbed her. Fearful of his mocking smile, and of derision from her classmates, she steps backward off a cliff, ending up in hospital with multiple injuries.

In the three stories above, the girls have long desired the boys, but it is the boys who make the first approach. In spite of this, the girls are all extremely sensitive to the shame of having expressed desire: any hint of a lack of reciprocity leads to withdrawal, self-blame and the loss of any hope for a romantic relationship. Ouyang Zi's narratives suggest that the protagonists are overly sensitive: the dialogue and actions of other characters in both "Half a Smile" and "Wooden Beauty" reveal how limited the perspectives of the protagonists are. They are not being mocked by classmates or toyed with by their dates; it is primarily their own exaggerated internal fear of humiliation that motivates their identity crisis and withdrawal. Nonetheless, readers might well have found their own adolescent experiences mirrored in some of the stories. C T Hsia would seem to confirm this: he comments on the prevalence of a "childish and often malicious inquisitiveness" which causes "many sensitive girls . . . [to] refuse to date in high school . . . to avoid . . . public exposure and the embarrassing consequences."¹⁵ Fear of rejection, of being humiliated in front of one's peers,

¹³ Ouyang Zi, "Mu mei ren" 木美人 (Wooden Beauty), *Autumn Leaves*, 67-72.

¹⁴ Ouyang Zi, "Ban ge wei xiao" 半個微笑 (Half a Smile), *Autumn Leaves*, 7-22.

¹⁵ C T Hsia, "The Chinese Sense of Humor," *Renditions* 9 (Spring 1978): 32.

is universal, but in Taiwan of the 1950s to 1970s dating was a serious and explicitly marriage-oriented modern practice: the responsibility of independently negotiating a 'love match' was doubtless intimidating in a society where traditional arrangements such as family recommendations and matchmaker introductions were still the norm.¹⁶

Ouyang Zi and Chen Ruoxi portray entry into the world of relationships as confusing and debilitating for young women, even in situations where their desire is actively expressed and reciprocated. Several stories depict an awareness that intimate personal relationships entail complex power relations: young protagonists find that their own desire is tainted by base motives, they reject brushes with taboo or forbidden desires and they observe intimate relationships between their elders with marked aversion.

Lihui, the protagonist of Ouyang Zi's "Cousin Suzhen"¹⁷ is "excited (*jidong* 激動, *xingfen* 興奮), her heart filled with the happiness of victory" when she experiences her first kiss, certain that her life has been transformed and that this is true love (183). On a subsequent date her boyfriend's feelings are described using the same vocabulary of active desire, while she becomes more worried about propriety: "He took hold of her waist, pulled her into his arms and began to kiss her. He became very excited (*jidong* 激動). She could feel that he was trembling slightly with excitement (*xingfen* 興奮). After a while he stuck in his tongue, exploring her mouth, then withdrew again and searched for her tongue with his lips. His body was pressing closer and closer, he kept changing his position and pulling her tighter to him It was as if he couldn't get enough kisses, that he was insatiable. She had never, never been so close to a man's body. She felt embarrassed, in a predicament, that she was doing something inappropriate. Confused, she wanted to let him go on kissing, but in the end she pulled her body away slightly. 'This isn't good' she murmured, 'it'd be bad if people saw us.'" He apologises, explaining that he is madly in love with her and suggesting marriage: it is his proposal rather than his caresses which bring her to a "climax of 'victory'" (*'shengli' de gaochao* '勝利'的高潮) (194-195).

In Ouyang Zi's "The Wall"¹⁸ Ruolan's long-standing aversion to her brother-in-law suddenly melts away when she looks up from her study of the history of English romantic literature to see his body bathed in golden light of the setting sun as he cuts loofahs from a tree in the yard. She watches him for some time, and when he pins a brooch to her chest that evening, his hand lightly brushing her breast, she feels a strange rush of physical pleasure

¹⁶ Chun-kit Joseph Wong, *The Changing Chinese Family Pattern in Taiwan* (Taipei: Southern Materials Center Inc., 1981), 80-84.

¹⁷ Ouyang Zi, "Suzhen biaojie" 素珍表姐 (Cousin Suzhen) *Autumn Leaves*, 183-200. First published *Modern Literature* Vol. 36 (January 1969): 4-15.

¹⁸ Ouyang Zi, "Qiang" 牆 (The Wall), *Autumn Leaves* 23-38.

(*kuaigan* 快感). (30-31) She subsequently expresses her desire by gazing from her window each evening when he comes back from work: he exchanges meaningful smiles with her, and after a few weeks follows her to her bedroom, taking her in his arms and telling her he only married her sister for her money. (24, 32, 34) Ruolan is torn: loyalty to her sister and awareness that her brother-in-law is twice her age compete with the intoxicating warmth and comfort of a man's embrace. She imagines he may even kiss her. (34-35) The next day, however, she resolves to cut off the relationship, angry at the divide he is building between the sisters and his selfish exploitation of his wife, who treats him like an emperor. (38). She questions her own feelings and the mutability of emotions in general: "A person could like someone one day, and then wake up the next day to find they despised them." (34) She is exhausted by her confused emotions, wanting only to escape, to sleep: "she knew that she would never know happiness in this life again." (88)¹⁹

The eponymous protagonist of Chen Ruoxi's "Qiaoqi"²⁰ is not afraid to explore certain aspects of her own sexuality: *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is on her bedside table, (102) she loves her body and enjoys making life-drawings in front of a mirror, relishing the shocked responses of her boyfriend and art teacher to her naked form. (106-107) Sexual relations, however, are problematic: mother and daughter exercise control over each other's sexual expression. Qiaoqi's mother, a divorcee, had remarried a much older man for financial security. Sensitive to her daughter's disgust when she observed any hint of intimacy between them, her mother had begun sleeping apart from her husband and never allowed him to touch her, at least in her daughter's presence. Qiaoqi is relieved, but then fears her stepfather's lustful eyes resting upon herself. (108) As for her own sexuality, Qiaoqi had been overcome with guilt when intimacy with her boyfriend had brought her to a peak of sexual excitement: "... he held my face and sucked on my lips, the tip of his tongue like a red-hot poker, burning so that my whole body trembled, from head to toe. Slowly, his lips moved up, biting on my ear, whispering into it in a low voice ... suddenly my face burnt red, my blood rushing the wrong way through my veins, violent enough to raise a spray (衝激起浪花), my heart wanting to jump from my chest, my whole body as soft as mud. Almost exactly at that moment, I felt the rush of a cold river sweeping across me, sudden as a thunderstorm, instantly freezing and stiffening my whole body." She remembered her mother's admonitions, and has stiffened with terror under her boyfriend's caresses ever since. (110) Like the protagonist of Ouyang Zi's "The Wall", she is desirous of "complete

¹⁹ This last sentence only appears in the early version of the story: *Modern Literature* Vol. 4 (December 1960): 79-89.

²⁰ Chen Ruoxi, "Qiaoqi" 喬其 (Qiaoqi), *Chen Ruoxi zixuan ji*, 101-116.

sleep . . . complete rest”: she turns to sleeping pills, which might provide her with permanent oblivion. (116)

Qianju, the protagonist of Ouyang Zi’s “Woman Possessed”²¹ is, like Qiaoqi, disgusted by her widowed mother’s relationship with a new husband. While Qiaoqi’s objection is the age difference between the couple and the knowledge that her mother had only married for money (and thus might herself have only tolerated, rather than enjoyed, her husband’s attentions), Qianju is disturbed by her mother’s precipitate marriage to a man who she admits is attractive and debonair, but who is clearly an exploitative philanderer: he has an affair with one of Qianju’s classmates. Her revulsion is heightened when her mother reveals the extent of her masochistic abasement to the man: slave to her passion, she had known that he would never commit to her, but had conducted an affair with him throughout her marriage to Qiaoqi’s father and was willing to tolerate his infidelity now. (167, 176-178) Sickened to the stomach, Qianju flees from her mother as from some “strange female animal.” (181)

While “The Wall” is an example of the Freudian model of desire and disgust (Ruolan’s initial aversion a manifestation of repressed desire), in most of the above stories the anthropological perspective is more applicable, reading aversion as the policing and containing of desire, concerned with “protecting the boundaries and maintaining the inner coherence of an existing formation of desire”.²² Disgust is expressed primarily in the context of relationships that transgress conventional social and moral codes: large age-gaps or adultery that undermines family relationships and the social order.

The primary emotions generated in young women in response to sexual matters, as presented above, are curiosity, vulnerability, disgust and ennui. Yet in spite of their fears, and although the young women eventually recoil from their partners, the fiction does provide a tentative model of active exploration of desire, contingent and ambivalent though it might be. Both traditional and modern Chinese discourses on female sexuality stress the passivity and responsivity of the female: “Male (*yang*) desire was associated with sudden and powerful excitement, expressed in words like ‘chongdong’ (impetuous) and ‘xingfen’ (excited). Female (*yin*) desire, on the few occasions that it was mentioned, was characterized as gentle and responsive.”²³ Yet in these texts the young female narrators view themselves

²¹ Ouyang Zi, “Mo nǚ” 魔女 (Woman Possessed), *Autumn Leaves*, 165-182.

²² See Chapter 4: “Sexual Disgust” in Jonathan Dollimore, *Sex, Literature and Censorship* (London: Polity Press, 2001), 46-69, esp. 54.

²³ Evans, *Women and Sexuality in China*, 45. Harriet Evans describes texts from the PRC in the 1950s, which she identifies as being based on both traditional and modern discourses. See also 191, and Dikötter, *Sex, Culture and Modernity in China*, 53-54, 58.

primarily as subjects, not as objects of desire; they are active in selecting and engaging their partners. The boys are the active partners of the passionate embraces, with their female partners initially responsive but then increasingly ambivalent, but the ambivalence is due to the young women being more conscious of social restraints (people seeing, disobeying a parent's injunctions, etc.). Each is initially curious about and eager for sexual contact, and their anticipation and initial responses are couched in active terms (*jidong*, *xingfen*, *chongji*) more commonly associated with male desire.

Modern Literature, in which most of the stories described above first appeared, had relatively small, primarily student audience, and was thus a space for young writers to experiment with relative freedom, without attracting the attention of the moralists. A novel by a well-established woman writer was banned at this time, for reasons which would have applied equally to the stories depicted above.²⁴ Social strictures on young women expressing desire or sexual awareness were strong, as evidenced by the notoriety afforded sixteen-year-old Li Ang when her story "Flower Season" was published in the *China Times* in 1968.²⁵ No more risqué and much less explicit than many of the stories detailed here, Li Ang's age and the very public forum her story was published in led to notoriety. She has been explicit about the fact that sex in her early work was symbolic, connected to a search for identity.²⁶ Li Ang published a number of stories in *Modern Literature* in the 1970s, primarily lamenting sexual ignorance and the lack of sex education. When the stories were published in book form in the late seventies, she was pilloried again. She comments that it wasn't until the mid eighties that these issues were openly discussed and "I became like a prophet."²⁷ As I demonstrate above, Li Ang was not the first young woman writer to begin explorations of sex and sexuality: in less public forums, these topics had been broached throughout the 1960s.

²⁴ The 1962 novel, *Xinsuo* (Lock of the Heart) by 郭良蕙 Guo Lianghui, was banned for two decades. It featured a woman who slept with her brother-in-law. See Edel Lancashire "The Lock of the Heart Controversy in Taiwan, 1962-63: A Question of Artistic Freedom and a Writer's Social Responsibility" *China Quarterly* No 103 (September 1985): 462-488.

²⁵ The story depicts a young girl fantasizing about the risk of being subject to a sexual attack. A comprehensive summary of Li Ang's fiction to 1984 can be found in Sylvia Dell, *Chinesische Gegenwartsliterature aus Taiwan: Die Autorin Li Ang: Erzählprosa und Rezeption bis 1984* (Bochum: Brockmeyer, 1988).

²⁶ Lin Yijie, "Panni yu jiushu" (Rebellion and salvation), interview in Li Ang, *Tamen de Yanlei* (Their Tears), (Taipei: Hongfan, 1984), 214.

²⁷ Li Ang, "Protest of a Woman Author against Reckless Accusations: Another self-interview, this time from Taipei" in Helmut Martin and Jeffrey Kinkley eds. *Modern Chinese Writers: Self-portrayals*. (Armonk, New York and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1992), 260. Born 1952, Li Ang has been labelled "the most consistent, successful, and influential writer of sexual fiction in Chinese," Howard Goldblatt, "Sex and Society: The Fiction of Li Ang" in Howard Goldblatt, ed., *Worlds Apart: Recent Chinese Writing and Its Audiences* (Armonk, New York: M E Sharpe, 1990).

3.2 Mimetic modernism versus authentic nativism?

The frequent motif in this early fiction, of a tormented young soul experiencing desire, subjecting herself to a detailed self-analysis of emotions and motivations and concluding with exhaustion, desirous only of escape, sleep or withdrawal, is characteristic of the modernist exploration of ennui and existential angst. There are clear parallels with turn-of-the-century European decadence: writers expressing their own longing for sexual liberation through depictions of adolescent anxiety, pairing sympathetic portrayals of teenage sexuality with tragedy or suicide: "The theme of early death, this image of sensitive youth crushed by the crude taste and behavior of its elders, was part of the decadent sensibility. So was the theme of exhaustion - a result of the constant quest for stimulation, the internalization of the frantic pace of modern life."²⁸ Parallels can also be drawn with the early work of Ding Ling, modern China's foremost writer on female subjectivity.²⁹ Her most famous story, "Miss Sophie's Diary," depicts the May Fourth "new woman" of China as a contradictory mass of "self-interrogation, ambivalence, and uncertainty."³⁰

These modernist themes were among the features of Taiwan's new writing of which the critics were most harshly critical. Some of the arguments were moralistic, accusing the modernists of reneging on the traditional responsibility of the literati to produce literature that upheld ideal moral values. Nativists argued that Western spiritual diseases such as existentialist despair and nihilistic moral depravity were alien to Taiwan, and that the modernists' writing was feigned, inauthentic and Westernized.³¹ Critic He Hsin wrote: "We simply cannot believe that the set of talented students in the literature department of National Taiwan University live in a world of love relations based on revenge and deceptions."³² Bai Xianyong argued the modernist's case: "As for the 'Westernised' personalities, thought and language of Ouyang Zi's fictional characters, this is true, because Ouyang Zi is describing people of a modern Chinese society, and these people have been, to a greater or lesser extent, 'Westernised'. Look at Taiwan society (especially urban society): we wear Western clothes, eat ice-cream, drink Coca-Cola . . . promote free love and monogamy. . . . 'Westernised' Chinese people are just as worthy subjects of fiction: their problems are even greater, their identity crises deeper. It is precisely because of their

²⁸ George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985), 108.

²⁹ Bonnie S McDougall and Kam Louie, *The Literature of China in the Twentieth Century* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1997), 130-134.

³⁰ Lydia H Liu, "The Female Tradition in Modern Chinese Literature: Negotiating Feminisms across East/West boundaries," *Genders* 12 (Winter 1991): 32.

³¹ Chang, *Modernism and the Nativist Resistance*, 5-6.

³² He Hsin, "Ouyang Zi shuo le xie shenme" (What has Ouyang Zi been saying?) in *Wenji* (Literary Quarterly) Vol. 1, August 1973, quoted in introduction to *Ouyang Xi ji*. 歐陽子集 (Selected works by Ouyang Zi), 11.

‘Westernisation’ that Ouyang Zi’s characters seem more complex, more real - because they are actual modern Chinese people.”³³ “Free love” in this context clearly means free choice in marriage rather than the Western notion of the lifting of social and legal restrictions on sexual relations outside of marriage.

Some of the modernists’ writing was derivative and imitative: a number of Ouyang Zi’s characters bear remarkable similarities to characters in D H Lawrence’s fiction, and she was candid about her influences.³⁴ The “soul love” that Ouyang Zi describes in her story “The Net”³⁵ could have been lifted from the pages of *Sons and Lovers*: “she scarcely looked upon Tang Peizhi as a man. She loved his soul, his spirit: soul and spirit were beyond gender distinctions. She had never desired his body.”(57) Critics of Ouyang Zi and the other modernists’ psychological fiction maintain that it is unrealistic, closely inspired by Western sources: “As many writers of the 1960s were relatively sheltered middle-class college students, the tendency to substitute categories of abstract knowledge obtained from book reading for the actual observation of life was exceedingly strong.”³⁶ This may be true on a superficial reading: the above quote does read like the transference of Lawrence’s characters into a Chinese setting. But a more detailed reading of the stories reveals significant differences. In the relationship between Miriam and Paul in *Sons and Lovers*, Paul’s perception of Miriam as sexless is disputed by another character: “she doesn’t want any of your soul communion. That’s your imagination. She wants you.”³⁷ Ouyang Zi’s protagonist’s lack of desire, by contrast, is undisputed in her text, and indeed by the author. Discussing her story, Ouyang Zi admits: “I was a totally inexperienced girl at that time, and very impressionable. . . . Professor Ashmead [her creative writing teacher at Iowa University] did question the plausibility of [her] never *desiring* [him]. ‘Is it possible?’ he asked me, ‘Didn’t she even once want to sleep with him?’ I was utterly unable to answer such a question (despite my bold stories I knew nothing about sex at the time), but I remember feeling a sense of disgust at the suggestion.”³⁸ In a revised version of the story Ouyang Zi duly alters her text, to read: “Although it might not be honest to say that she had

³³ Bai Xianrong, “Tan xiaoshuo piping de biao zhun: du Tang Qisong ‘Ouyang Zi de Qiuye’ yu gan” (Criteria for the criticism of fiction: after reading “Ouyang Zi’s *Autumn Leaves*,” by Tang Qisong), *Mouran huishou* (Suddenly looking back) (Taipei: Erya chubanshe, 1978), 46-47.

³⁴ See Chang, *Modernism and the Nativist Resistance*, 42 and Bai Xianrong, “Tan xiaoshuo piping,” 49.

³⁵ Ouyang Zi, “Wang” 網 (The Net), *The Girl with Long Hair*.

³⁶ Chang, *Modernism and the Nativist Resistance*, 41-42.

³⁷ D H Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers* (London: Penguin, 1949), 307-8, 339.

³⁸ Lindfors, “Private Lives”, 293. Lindfors quotes from private correspondence with Ouyang Zi, March 20, 1981.

never desired him, she had sensed from the start that things would not turn out that way between them.”³⁹

Knowing nothing about sex is clearly no bar to imagining and describing desire. The strong identification which Ouyang Zi makes with her character - the authenticity of the absence of desire, disgust at the very thought - would support Bai Xianyong’s contention that Ouyang Zi is describing “actual, modern Chinese people,” and sentiments that the author feels to be authentic. The student audience that made up the main readership of *Modern Literature* may have been able to relate at many levels to the social-sexual dilemmas presented in these stories: while Ouyang Zi’s text reads like a pale imitation of Lawrence, it is in fact exploring a very different situation.

A feminist reading of “The Net”, situating it in the social context of its time, interprets the story as a lament at the alienation of young women from their sexuality in contemporary Taiwan and an exposé of the effacement of women within hierarchical marital structures. While the young author may have identified with her protagonist in not being able to associate a spiritual partnership with sexual desire, it is clearly this alienation from her sexuality which leads Yu Wenqin to marry someone other than her soul-mate: she chooses instead a conventional hierarchical relationship in which she feels secure in spite of the lack of equality. After a chance meeting with her old soul-mate, however, Wenqin “suddenly felt her hibernating ‘will’ moving, awakening inside her.” (44) Her awakening is clearly associated with her sexuality: its first manifestation is when she denies her husband sex. The story can thus be read as exposing the destructive consequences of a disassociation between spiritual love, desire and marriage: by the time Wenqin is awakened and experiences for the first time a sense of autonomy regarding her desires, she is unable to escape from the marriage to which she has sacrificed herself.

The stories which most alienated Ouyang Zi’s critics were those with plots involving Oedipal, semi-incestuous relationships and psychologically disturbed characters. Yet there are often indications of conventional social/sexual explanations behind the abnormal psychology of her characters, undermining the critics’ assertions of amoral, nihilistic plots. A critic railed: “We . . . find it hard to believe that only motivation in life for thirty- and forty-year old women might be the perverse sexual motivations of Yifen and Lifan or Lanfang and Dunzhi’s obstruction of their sons’ romances to avoid sinking into

³⁹ Ouyang Zi, *Autumn Leaves*, 43. While in Iowa Ouyang Zi made a number of revisions to ‘sex up’ the early versions of her stories. For example, the more modest ‘intimate’ (*qinre* 親熱) is replaced by ‘made love’ (*qinre*

emptiness.”⁴⁰ Yifen’s perversity in “Autumn Leaves” is her attraction to her step-son. The young man is in fact closer to her own age than her new husband: he is twenty-one, she is thirty, her husband fifty. Her marriage was arranged, and both men are equally new to her, undermining the connotations of incest. Yifen has more in common with the younger man: they share a spiritual communion that she *does* connect to physical attraction (unlike the protagonist of “The Net”, Yifen is not virginal: she has been widowed.)⁴¹?? Lifen’s husband, in “Approaching Dusk,” is sixty and often away from home, she is forty, and the young men she sleeps with are in their twenties. The old family retainer comments at the end of the story: “Right from the start I said that there could be no good end in a marriage with such an age difference. The old master is twenty years older than his wife, he could be her father.”(135)⁴² The age differences are not particularly emphasized in the texts, but they are featured, potentially explaining the women’s dissatisfaction (sexual or otherwise) within their marriages. The double standard regarding the social acceptability of a much younger wife versus the taboo of a woman indulging in a sexual relationship with a younger man is implicitly questioned.

As for the Oedipal mothers obstructing their son’s relationships, Lanfang’s obstruction of her son’s romance in “Prodigal Father” stems primarily from her conservative sexual morality: the girl has a bad reputation and is rumoured to have had an abortion after running off with a servant. Lanfang is indeed abnormally attached to her son, but mainly because her husband has withdrawn from her because of his own psychological inadequacies.⁴³ Likewise, Dunzhi’s transference of her primary affections from husband to son in “Awakening” is explained as a reaction to his infidelity: she finds herself unable to feel close to him after catching him having sex with a washerwoman in the yard. In an early version of the story she stops sleeping with her husband altogether after this incident, sharing a bed with her young son instead. In a later version, Dunzhi is reconciled to her husband, although she “never enjoyed sleeping with him again, tolerating his advances only because she felt this was her inalienable duty as a wife. But every time she slept with him after that, she . . . felt like a prostitute.”⁴⁴ Dunzhi’s disapproval of her son’s relationship is also couched in morally conservative terms: the girl is too forward and independent for her

zuoi 親熱做愛) in the revised version of “Jin huanghun shi” 近黃昏時 (Approaching Dusk): *The girl with long hair*, 147. *Autumn Leaves*, 122.

⁴⁰ He Hsin, “What has Ouyang Zi been saying?” *Ouyang Xi ji*. 歐陽子集 (Selected works by Ouyang Zi), 11.

⁴¹ Ouyang Zi, “Qiu ye” 秋葉 (Autumn Leaves), *Autumn Leaves*, 201-230.

⁴² Ouyang Zi, “Jin huanghun shi” 近黃昏時 (Approaching Dusk). *Autumn Leaves*, 121-136.

⁴³ Ouyang Zi, “Lang zi” 浪子 (Prodigal Father). *Autumn Leaves*, 105-120.

⁴⁴ Ouyang Zi, Compare “Juexing” 覺醒 (Awakening), *Autumn Leaves*, 76 with *The Girl with Long Hair*, 90-91.

liking. Dunzhi's rational (conservative) objections to the girl become more prominent in each of three reworked versions of the story.

Indicating the presence of conservative morality in modernist texts does not imply that the writers were necessarily supportive of conservative conventions of normative sexual behaviour. The fiction certainly functions to introduce unfamiliar pathways of desire to its Taiwanese audience, inviting consideration of the possibilities of illicit or taboo pleasures. One of the important contributions of the modernists to the development of Taiwan literature was their rejection of the traditional and May Fourth idea that writers should shoulder the burden of upholding moral values: they wanted to be free to explore much more widely. "We believe that the old artistic forms and styles are no longer sufficient for expressing our artistic sentiments as part of contemporary society. . . . We respect tradition but don't feel it necessary either to blindly imitate tradition or to violently uproot it. However, where necessity dictates, we may engage in a little 'constructive deconstruction.'" [The English term is given in addition to the Chinese.]⁴⁵

It is interesting to note, however, that it is three of Chen Ruoxi's nativist, rather than modernist short stories that are most boldly "constructively deconstructive" of conservative morality with regard to the expression of female sexuality. Most women writers of the period produced fiction which presented the repression of women in traditional society, contrasting the evils of feudal patriarchy with the relative freedom and equality afforded women in present-day Taiwan.⁴⁶ Chen Ruoxi's nativist narratives, by contrast, feature rural protagonists in a traditional society that is relatively tolerant and forgiving of female transgressions of the moral code. A wife's infidelity or sexual history forms the key to the plot of two stories, while the third focuses on a single mother. The stories below both first appeared in *Modern Literature* alongside the more characteristically modernist work presented above.⁴⁷

"Xinzhuang"⁴⁸ details the eponymous protagonist's misery as he becomes aware that his wife is probably being unfaithful to him with their erstwhile lodger, Chang Jiaogao (literally "Tall Long-foot"). Chang is sturdy and broad-shouldered, with a thick crop of chest hair showing above his shirt buttons, while Xinzhuang has over-worked himself into a sickly shadow of a man; exhaustion and illness have resulted in his total neglect of his wife. The

⁴⁵ "Opening Words" of the inaugural edition: *Modern Literature*: Vol. 1 (March 1960), 2.

⁴⁶ Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang, "Three generations of Taiwan's Contemporary Women Writers: a critical introduction," Ann C Carver and Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang eds. *Bamboo Shoots after the Rain: Contemporary Short Stories by Women Writers of Taiwan* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1990), xvii-xviii.

⁴⁷ See Appendix for list of work published in *Modern Literature*.

⁴⁸ Chen Ruoxi, "Xinzhuang" 辛莊 (Xinzhuang), in *Chen Ruoxi zixuan ji*, 83-100.

knowledge that she may be having relations with another man reawakens his awareness of her as a sexual being: with burning cheeks he presses his ear to the bathroom wall to listen to her undress and bathe. (95) Xinzhuang's friends refrain from publicly condemning the woman and her lover, simply dropping Xinzhuang oblique hints regarding her infidelity and advising him to spend more time at home: "you ought to know, it's hard for a woman without a man in the house." The situation depicted is one of tacit acceptance of a woman's sexual needs and of understanding that neglect by her husband might cause her to seek satisfaction elsewhere.

"Peach Blossom"⁴⁹ depicts a similar rural setting, in which a Daoist spiritual medium is engaged by Peach Blossom's husband in a last resort to save his ailing wife. Through the medium, Peach Blossom relives her past, revealing her early awareness of her own sexual needs: "Twenty-one years of age, alone at night, sighing and hugging my bedding with an empty and anxious heart." (135) She had seduced the young man whose ghost is the cause of her illness by bathing naked in the river when she knew he was sure to pass. After conquering him she had grown bored, tormenting him with claims that "If I wanted to, I could have all the boys in that family" (136) She is subsequently caught *in flagrante* with a carpenter, however, and is forced to marry him instead of the young man she had seduced. He dies, suicide indicated. In order to appease this unhappy spirit and save his wife, Peach Blossom's husband declares in front of the medium and all present that he will give both their children, and any future children of their marriage, the dead man's surname. Once again, we are presented with the depiction of an uninhibited, sexually proactive young woman, and the absence of moral condemnation from rural society.

The protagonist of "Last Performance"⁵⁰ is a drug-addicted local opera singer who is now a single mother after having enjoyed "decadent, undisciplined days" with her lover. She decides against marrying a tea merchant for the sake of respectability, choosing instead to continue her career and allow a friend to bring up her baby rather than play the role of "virtuous wife, good mother." Performers and singers have traditionally occupied marginal status in Chinese society, and this woman lives her life outside the parameters of traditional Confucian morality without any indication of moral disapproval from her peers.⁵¹ While she does not romanticize the singer's life, Chen's sympathetic portrayal once again subverts the usual trope of depicting women in traditional Chinese society as universally repressed.

⁴⁹ Chen Ruoxi, "Furen Taohua" 夫人桃花 (Peach Blossom), in *Chen Ruoxi zixuan ji*, 129-138.

⁵⁰ Chen Ruoxi, "Zuihou yexi" 最後夜戲 (Last Performance), in *Chen Ruoxi zixuan ji*, 117-128.

⁵¹ See Anders Hansson, *Chinese Outcasts: Discrimination and Emancipation in Late Imperial China* (Leiden: Brill, 1996) for background on the social position of musicians and entertainers.

The discrepancy between the tone of these three stories and those depicting the excessive sensitivity of the sexually inexperienced young women of modern-day Taiwan is notable. As students at Taiwan's premier institution of learning, the young women involved in the *Modern Literature* were part of a minority educated elite. However avant-garde their thinking, their experiences were limited, and they were subject in their own lives to the pressure of elitist discourses on femininity and appropriate behaviour for their sex. The Nationalist government's vision of modernity promoted equality for women in many spheres, but was by no means emancipatory in sexual terms.⁵² As the daughter of a carpenter Chen Ruoxi had greater access to and knowledge about lives of the poorer classes of rural, native Taiwanese. She referred to these people as "more authentic, healthier."⁵³ In the two stories detailed above she reveals an awareness that different levels of society are subject to different discourses, portraying the rural poor as less tormented about sexuality and less subject to the inscription of restrictive moral precepts.⁵⁴ While the theme of female sexuality is still prominent, Chen's nativist stories feature a much less problematic portrayal of female sexuality and self-acceptance.

The modernists themselves, and not only their critics, draw attention to the influence of Western culture in the sexual awakening of their young protagonists: *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and the study of English romantic literature are features of the scenes in which one character explores her naked body and a second is struck with the beauty of her brother-in-law's body, as detailed above. Chen Ruoxi indicates a self-reflexive consciousness of the narcissism and self-indulgence of her modern characters when she has one of these characters acknowledge the lack of correspondence between Western texts and her own experiences and sensibilities: Qiaoqi tosses her copy of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* away, because: "I think Lawrence really talks a load of rubbish!"⁵⁵ More quotidian Western influences are also apparent, however: in Chen Ruoxi's nativist story, "A Morning for Chao-ti,"⁵⁶ a poor rural protagonist is reminded of her own youth and lost sexual potential

⁵² See Norma Diamond, "Women under Kuomintang Rule: Variations on the Feminine Mystique" *Modern China* 1 (1975): 6-7.

⁵³ Chen Ruoxi, afterword to *Chen Ruoxi zixuan ji*, 194.

⁵⁴ Rubie Watson draws attention to the different responses of different levels of Chinese society to the rapid social change of the mid eighteenth century when she compares Mann's depiction of "literati glorifications of refined femininity" with Jaschok's "upside down" world of commercial colonial Hong Kong, where "tradition-bound moral agents were ineffective". Rubie S. Watson "Marriage and gender inequality" in her Afterword to Rubie S. Watson & Patricia B. Ebrey, *Marriage and Inequality in Chinese Society* (Taipei: The Regents of the University of California, 1991), 360. She refers to the article by Susan Mann, "Grooming a Daughter for Marriage: Brides and wives in the mid-Ch'ing period", in the same volume, esp. 205, 222, and to Maria Jaschok, *Concubines and Bondservants: the social history of a Chinese custom* (London: Zed Press, 1988).

⁵⁵ Chen Ruoxi, "Qiaoqi" 喬其 (Qiaoqi), in *Chen Ruoxi zixuan ji*, 103.

⁵⁶ Chen Ruoxi, "A Morning for Chao-ti," in *Spirit Calling*, 3-10.

by a wall-calendar displaying “a foreign beauty who smiled with inviting voluptuousness.”(6)

Sexuality and relationships between the sexes are central preoccupations of both Chen Ruoxi and Ouyang Zi in their early twenties; a topic of both the modernist and nativist stories that appear in *Modern Literature*. Although they do draw on Western models, the stories problematising early sexual experience clearly reflect authentic concerns of the writers and their young readership. The more bizarre modernist stories may have reflected exaggerated and improbable situations, but the presence of conventional sociological explanations for many of the situations in Ouyang Zi’s stories do allow a reading which throws light on gender politics of the time: the stories are not purely “mimetic.” The nativist stories of Chen Ruoxi, in spite of their more “authentic” prosaic style and familiar form, are just as radical: a reading of sex in the two types of fiction breaks down the dichotomy between modernist and nativist fiction.

3.3 Sex and the other

Sexualisation of the West is a common feature of nationalist postcolonial texts. This is as true of China as of countries directly affected by Western imperialism through colonisation. Frank Dikötter states that the “conceptual link between nationalism and sexuality, expressed most clearly by representations of an uncontrolled and ‘foreign’ sexuality, was as widespread in Republican China as it was in Europe.”⁵⁷ Just as Orientalism has acted in shaping Western conceptions of sexuality through construction of the legendary Orient and its exotic “other,” so “Occidental exoticism” constructs an imaginary West, both drawing on and subverting already-existing constructs. Leo Ou-fan Lee describes “a process of mutual exoticization in cross-cultural reception,” where “Chinese writers’ fervent espousal of Occidental exoticism . . . turned Western culture itself into an ‘other’ in the process of constructing their own modern imaginary.”⁵⁸ Rey Chow maintains that the fact that it is not only the West that re-creates a fictional East is a truth often ignored in Chinese studies: in seeking to avoid Orientalism, Western discourses tend to produce “a non-West that is deprived of fantasy, desires, and contradictory emotions.”⁵⁹ Below, I examine the positioning of Chinese characters with regard to their own image as well as their perceptions

⁵⁷ Dikötter, *Sex, Culture and Modernity in China*, 131.

⁵⁸ Lee is writing in the context of 1930s and 1940s Shanghai. Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The flowering of a new urban culture in China 1930-1945* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London; Harvard University Press, 1999), 203, 309.

of America. First, I identify self-Orientalising strategies in young, female Taiwanese protagonists in the United States. I then look at Chinese perceptions of America as a dangerously liberal country, and then at the process whereby for those for whom America has become “home”, the “othering” begins to work in reverse: Taiwan becomes the exotic and dangerous “other.”

3.3.1 Self-Orientalism

Some of the earliest depictions of life in the United States to feature in *Modern Literature* were provided by Yu Lihua, one of the earliest student émigrés, generally regarded as a pioneer of the Chinese literary movement overseas.⁶⁰ Her short stories appeared alongside many of the pieces discussed above. “Waiting” 等⁶¹ provides a vivid, almost grotesque description of the male, Western “other”, and a Taiwanese woman who perceives herself as the opposite: fragile, pure and self-sacrificing. The first-person narrator has left her mother and sweetheart behind in Taiwan in order to make money as a maidservant in the United States. She marries her American employer, who is twice her age, primarily for his wealth, although also ostensibly to avoid being raped by him: she decides that if she is going to sacrifice her body, she might as well get something in exchange, telling him that “if he would wait a few more days, I would marry him, so he could have me every day, and enjoy my body every night.” (26) The protagonist is not attracted to her husband: she expresses a strong physical repulsion, repeatedly describing him as coarse, fat, and hairy: a big ape. (In an aside to her readers, she remarks that “there is one advantage to marrying a foreigner: you can use all sorts of poisonous Chinese words to curse him with.”) (23) Before their marriage is consummated, she watches him eating a young fowl. It is a metaphor for her own young body: white flesh and a red heart being gobbled up in his big mouth, with thin lips buried in fat cheeks. (23) After her marriage, although her husband’s actions are attentive and caring, and the protagonist does acknowledge that the experience of carnal relations was not nearly as unpleasant as she had expected, even admitting to some “empty and transient” sexual pleasure, she continues to contrast her husband’s animal-like desire with her own chaste love for the sweetheart she has in fact so cruelly betrayed: he snores loudly as she reads novels which take her back to her idealised youth, when love was as “pure as a snowflake that has not touched the ground.” (27-29)

⁵⁹ Rey Chow, *Women and Chinese Modernity: The politics of reading between West and East* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), xiii.

⁶⁰ Yu Lihua: born in Shanghai 1931, graduated National Taiwan University and emigrated to the US in 1953.

⁶¹ Yu Lihua “Waiting” 等 (Deng), *Modern Literature* Vol. 20 (1964): 22-30.

Ouyang Zi's story, "Dating" which appeared in the next issue of the journal, is a rather more subtle portrayal of a character's construction of racial and cultural difference. The Taiwanese protagonist of "Dating"⁶² is seeing an American student who holds "eastern spiritual civilisation" in great esteem.⁽³⁾ Meilian deliberately orientalises her appearance by wearing *qipao* (cheongsam) that she would never wear in Taipei and flat shoes instead of the high heels she wears at home, in order "to emphasise that she was different, that she was Chinese, and not the same as American girls." This difference is a quality he expressly admires in her: "Paul made Meilian feel Chinese, much more powerfully than any Chinese man could."^(5, 2, 3) In the later version of this story, the same deliberate construction is expressed with greater emphasis on the self-fashioning: "In front of Paul, she wanted to be one-hundred percent Chinese."⁽⁹⁵⁾ Although she is keen to utilise the aesthetically pleasing aspect of her cultural capital, her date's serious respect for her difference extends to a respect for her sexual person that is somewhat problematic: while American couples kiss and walk hand-in-hand, she knows that he will not dare touch her. ^(2, 7) Meilian's construction of a gendered and racial difference casts her in the self-imposed role of a silent, passive female, wishing that her American boyfriend would respect her words less and simply impose his desires (which match her own) onto her. ^(7, 10)⁶³

While I read the stories above as relatively straightforward examples of unreliable narrators, the clues to this unreliability are subtle, particularly for a readership unfamiliar with this device. A good proportion of the original readership may simply have empathized with the narrators, without the stories engendering a (self-)critical response with regard to the self-conceits of the protagonists. In two stories produced rather later than the above, the authors' distancing effects are much more explicit. The eponymous protagonist of Ouyang Zi's "Meirong,"⁶⁴ friendly and self-effacing among her friends, is exposed in the third-person narrative as calculating and manipulative. She finishes with one boyfriend in Taiwan and attaches herself to another with whom she can travel to the States for further studies, deliberating: "How many *qipao* and how many pairs of high heels should she take with her to America? Should she pierce her ears and wear earrings when she got to the States? . . . [For] who knows how things might turn out after arriving in America. Perhaps it will be full of suave, handsome *gentlemen* [English in the original], all tall and with PhDs. One never can tell." Her tactical self-orientalising strategy is clear.

⁶² Ouyang Zi "Dating" 約會 (Yue hui), *Modern Literature* Vol. 21 (1964): 1-13. Later renamed "Kaoyan" 考驗 (The Test), *Autumn Leaves*, 89-104.

⁶³ In Chapter 5 I will argue that in the later version of the story the emphasis changes, giving more weight to cultural social obstacles to their relationship.

⁶⁴ Ouyang Zi, "Meirong" 美容 (Meirong), *Modern Literature* Vol. 29 (1966), 162.

The following story by Li Ang is included here both to illustrate the theme of self-orientalism and to demonstrate her use of a narrative technique which ensures that the reader does not miss the didactic message. "Miss Sophia's Story"⁶⁵ begins by seeming to invite sympathy for Sophia, whose American boyfriend has indulged in various relationships in Taiwan, mainly with "Westernised" Taiwanese girls, who Sophia believes are more forward and implicitly freer with their sexual favours than she is. Sophia maintains that he genuinely loves her and that it is only because she is still so "Chinese" that Rod keeps needing to turn to other women. (109-10) She follows him to the United States, where his lack of interest in her becomes clear, and she finds she may have to resort to other means to acquire a green card. She pursues various avenues, including an attempt to seduce one of her tutors. This is where the distancing effect comes in, in the form of the scepticism of Sophia's Taiwanese flatmate. Rather than acknowledge her tutor's apparent lack of interest, Sophia claims that he must not understand her: "That's where the problem lies. You know I always play the role of a mysterious, inscrutable Eastern girl in front of him. I've probably overdone it a bit, and that's why he can't guess my real feelings." (118) Her friend expresses concern about her plans for seduction, worrying that her tutor might lose respect for her, think her "easy," or attribute this sort of behavior to all Chinese girls. Sophia ridicules this suggestion, presuming herself to be far more au fait with American practices: "Why is it that you never understand anything properly - we're in America, not in Taiwan. . . . Easy or not easy depends on your frame of reference. You know as well as I do that American girls with steady boyfriends carry on sleeping with other people." (119) It is only after the failure of her plans that Sophia feels compelled to acknowledge that her friend may be right: "Jenny, remember how you told me before, that sometimes, because of racial or cultural differences, people have different ways of doing things or seeing things. I've been thinking, perhaps you were right." (125)

Li Ang, while drawing on her predecessors' constructs of sexualised Americans and self-orientalising Taiwanese, is much more explicit in having her character come to realise that her understanding is flawed: that there is no simple dichotomy between Eastern and Western behaviour. The artifice of self-orientalisation, revealed implicitly by Ouyang Zi to create obstacles in cross-cultural relationships, is made explicit in this story, and its self-defeating futility is revealed. Taken together, the above stories can be seen as attempts to

⁶⁵ "Sufeiya xiaojie de gushi" (Miss Sophia's Story) in Li Ang and Gao Tiansheng ed., *Li Ang Ji* (Li Ang Collected) (Taipei: Qianwei, 1992). First published in *Lianhebao* (United Daily News), 17 November 1977. The character chooses her name after the actress Sophia Loren; parallels with Ding Ling's famous protagonist of the same name can only be inferred. For an article on 'Chinese Sophies' see Raoul David Findeisen. "Anarchist or Saint? On the spread of 'Wisdom' (Sophia) in Modern Chinese Literature." *Asiatica Venetiana* 3. 1998 91-104.

expose the scheming naiveté displayed by Taiwanese protagonists who artificially or hypocritically maintain the stereotyped dichotomies between self and other. In a study of similar themes in the fiction of another Taiwanese contemporary, Chen Yingzhen, Lucien Miller finds that: “when a character encounters the other in a foreign personality or culture, the awareness of an abyss within the self’s interior deepens . . . but often the discovery of interior otherness leads to personal growth and understanding.”⁶⁶ In the fiction I have described, this lesson is also present, though perhaps more subtly. Through the use of irony and unreliable narrators, the authors break down the dichotomy between an East conceived of as chaste and pure, versus a West portrayed as liberal and carnal, creating, for the perceptive reader, a counter-text that incites a critical response and forces readers to consider alternative modes of thinking about and relating to “self” as well as the “other” that is the new home of these socially engaged writers.

Parallels must of course be drawn between young Taiwanese protagonists wishing to attract American men and the strategies used by women of any background to attract male partners.⁶⁷ The processes I have described as self-orientalisation could also be described as expression of Betty Friedan’s “feminine mystique:” exoticism as an accessory in their primary aim of constructing a feminine “otherness,” which, as Friedan makes clear, restricts and debilitates women much more than it empowers them in relation to men in a patriarchal society.⁶⁸ Luce Irigaray too, writes of femininity as “masquerade.” “When she is asked to maintain, to revive, man’s desire, what this means in terms of the value of her own desire is neglected. Moreover, she is not aware of her desire, at least not explicitly. But the force and continuity of her desire are capable of nurturing all the ‘feminine’ masquerades that are expected of her for a long time.”⁶⁹ The masquerade here is Orientalism, and the desires of the protagonists have more to do with green cards than with sex. The power nexus between race and gender is key: it is thus perhaps Joan Riviere’s psychoanalytic interpretation of “femininity as masquerade” in terms of aggression and conflict resolution that is most revelatory here. For Riviere the feminine masquerade is taken on by women who want to take the place of men, who “wish[] for masculinity” but hide this desire, afraid of the

⁶⁶ Lucien Miller, “Occidentalism and Alterity: Native self and foreign other in Chen Yingzhen and Shusaku Endo,” *Chinoperl Papers* 20-22 (1997-1999) *Stories and Songs: A Festschrift for Cyril Birch*. (New Hampshire: Chinoperl, 1999), 213.

⁶⁷ I have found very little contemporary feminist criticism of the literature in Chinese, but the following article directly refers to Friedan: Chen Ruiwen, “Yu Lihua de changpian xiaoshuo: *Bian zhong de renwu ji zhufubing*” (Yu Lihua’s Novels: Characterisation and the housewife syndrome in *The Change*) in *Zhongwai wenxue* (Chung Wai Literary Monthly) No. 12 (May 1974), 30-42.

⁶⁸ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1965).

retribution expected from men.⁷⁰ In the same way, a masquerade of “Orientalism” may be a strategy designed to avert the retribution feared on the part of a Chinese subject who feels an unconscious aggression towards the dominating West.

The stories described above were all produced in the early periods of the authors’ residencies abroad, when they too were young women and the West was new to them. In their later work, there is very little indication of “Orientalism,” with the exception of a few references where Asian women are seeking *not* to be stereotyped in this way: Li Li has a Japanese American woman claim that “my blasted ex-husband lived eternally in the hope and fantasy that what he’d married was a Madame Butterfly. He never saw me, the person, as a person, a unique, individual person.”⁷¹ The protagonist of Chen Ruoxi’s *Paper Marriage* too, is sensitive that she should not be seen as playing at self-Orientalism: after their meeting with the immigration officials who are to judge whether or not their marriage is indeed genuine (it is not), her “husband” praises her: “It was you who softened their hearts. . . . The way you nodded and then lowered your head, lovely and pliant like a little bird - that’s exactly the image Americans have of the cutest Oriental women!” The protagonist “was speechless: so my shame and guilty conscience rendered me, in the eyes of the Americans, the model of a submissive Oriental doll!” (142)

The fiction addressed so far is primarily very early work by the authors, exploring relationships with the opposite sex in single, young protagonists. When the authors themselves are married and in stable relationships, other themes become more important, but messages about sex and sexuality are still implicit in a number of stories, framed by concerns about modernisation and social change.

3.3.2 The dangers of the sexually liberal United States

The liberal sexual values of America are always seen as dangerous in the fiction: while the characters enjoy and appreciate many of the freedoms that are available to them, none condone the sexual freedom that is practised in the United States, particularly in California, where most of the stories of both Chen Ruoxi and Li Li are set. Chinese parents

⁶⁹ Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1977), 131. English translation, “This Sex Which is Not One” in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, edited by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, (London and New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1981), 102.

⁷⁰ Joan Riviere, “Womanliness as a Masquerade,” in *Formations of Fantasy*, eds. Victor Burgin, James Donald, Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen, 1986), 35. First published in *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, Vol. 10, 1929. Quoted by Butler in *Gender Trouble*, 64-68.

⁷¹ Li Li, *Qingcheng 傾城* (The Fall of a City) (Taipei: Lianjing chuban gongsi, 1989), 29

bringing up their children in America are often worried about their children absorbing liberal attitudes to sex and dating.

One of the earliest stories in *Modern Literature* depicting an America that is inherently carnal is Yu Lihua's "Child's Play" 兒戲.⁷² A group of children, most of whom seem to be Chinese, are at a sleepover party where a ten-year-old boy and thirteen-year old girl lose their virginity in sexual play instigated by the oldest girl in the group, a fourteen year old with a Western-sounding name. There is no explicit indication that this is a peculiarly American phenomenon, but it seems likely that the journal's Taiwanese readership would attribute this type of incident to the environment of the United States, particularly as it is the child with the foreign name and liberal parents who takes the lead in discussing sexual issues and instigating the sexual play.

The protagonist of Chen Ruoxi's "The Crossroads" sees her maturing daughter beginning to look and act like her American peers: she has lost her bashful innocence, dancing wildly and shaking her body. Observing her daughter's growing breasts, her heart sinks: "Mother was right, . . . I should have taken my child back to Taiwan sooner." She does not wish to acknowledge her daughter's sexuality, vaguely insisting that "Taiwanese girls should not be like the others. They should be better."⁷³ "Better" presumably means less sexual, or less sexually overt, than her American peers. In Li Li's *The Fall of a City*, a mother experiences the same fears: her twelve-year old daughter's breasts are developing, and she doesn't know "whether to be happy or worried about the shocking speed at which her daughter is becoming a slim and beautiful young woman." (5) The girl's father is horrified when he comes home to find his daughter alone in her room with a boy: he gives her a long lecture, referring to the "bad social environment." His daughter's reaction to the tirade is to wish that she had been born "white skinned, blonde haired and blue-eyed", as if being American might have made her situation easier. (99) The daughter in Chen's *Foresight* has begun to have sex with her American boyfriend. Her mother worries: "Perhaps this is the result of Americanisation. . . . She thinks she has already completely grown up, which of course is good, and she has an independent spirit. But she's too subjective, she thinks that everything she thinks and does is right, and she doesn't need to discuss it with an adult - she never considers that she's only seventeen. I feel that since coming to America, I've lost half a daughter." (137)

⁷² Yu Lihua "Child's Play" 兒戲(Erxi) *Modern Literature* Vol. 37 (1969): 77-93. I have made the assumption that Baoling is a transcription of the Western name Pauline, while Meimin, Yimin, Huiwen, Huijie and Yushi seem to be Chinese names.

⁷³ Chen Ruoxi, "Lukou" 路口 (The Crossroads) translated in Kao, ed., *Crossroads*. 18,19.

America is not just depicted as a liberal society: it is also a dangerous one. The male protagonist of *Breaking Out* hears of the rape of a Chinese student, and thinks to himself “Rape was a part of American life, perhaps a price that had to be paid for Americanisation.” (204) The same sentiments are expressed by the female narrator of *Paper Marriage*, who also hears of a recent case of rape: “broken families, drug-taking, crime, homosexuality, and now AIDS. . . . It’s possible that these are the price to be paid for a high level of democracy and freedom.” (246)

3.3.3 The dangers of sexually liberal Taiwan

In the later fiction of Chen Ruoxi and Li Li, where protagonists are long-term residents in the United States, it is Taiwan that becomes the sexually dangerous country. Whereas in America women worry about their children growing up with sexually liberal attitudes, their fear about Taiwan is that their husbands will be corrupted there.

The narrator of Chen Ruoxi’s “On the other side of the Pacific”⁷⁴ thinks the rumours about Taiwan are a joke, and jibes at her sister-in-law: “You don’t have to worry about him here in America! . . . We don’t have that kind of ‘noontime wife’ you told me about. No seducer, no one seduced.” They laugh, but her sister-in-law is serious: “You have no idea how addicted men are to that wild night life of wine, women and song in Taipei!” The narrator is sceptical: “Judging by the way she talked, one would think that [she] wanted to tie her husband up with a leash. Yizhen felt that [she] was unduly nervous. Perhaps [her husband] had a ‘previous record’ in Taiwan, but she was too embarrassed to ask.” (89)

Li Li presents a character with the same innocent good faith as the narrator of Chen’s story in “Two cities.”⁷⁵ She is annoyed by the number of her Chinese friends in America who joke about Taiwan and warn her not to let her husband stay there too long alone, and surprised when even her Taiwanese friend warns her: “perhaps you don’t know what has happened to marital ethics in Taipei. . . . I’d advise you to quickly drag your husband back to your germ-free [American] environment.” (13, 45-46) Their warnings all prove prescient, however – her husband does begin an affair almost as soon as he arrives.

In another of Chen’s stories, the US-based Taiwanese protagonist is more aware of the changes in Taiwanese morality: when her friend from the PRC tells her “Beijing women are not as bashful as Taipei’s – they’ll break their necks trying to marry any student who’s returned from studying in the United States” she responds: “As far as that goes, it’s the same

⁷⁴ Chen Ruoxi, “Xiangzhe Taipingyang bi’an” 向著太平洋彼岸 (On the Other Side of the Pacific), translated in Kao ed., *Crossroads*, 79-152.

⁷⁵ Li Li “Shuang cheng” 雙城 (Two cities) in *The Floating World*, 1-86.

situation in Taiwan. Women in Taiwan aren't that bashful anymore either, and ultimately quite a few marriages are broken up because of it."⁷⁶ (49)

The protagonist of "Walking out of the drizzling mist,"⁷⁷ the Taiwanese mistress of a long-term resident in the United States, is explicit that "In comparison with Taiwan, American freedom was restricted." (8) She finds it ironic that in America, which she had thought "a land of freedom and liberty," it is in fact much more difficult for a professor to conduct an affair with his student. He might be able to be late for dinner in America, but he would never be able to spend a whole night out: Taiwan is the place where sexual liaisons are easy, with its hot springs and bathhouses open late into the night.

Here we see a process of "othering" of what was originally the home ground: an indicator as much of the adaptation of the writers to the United States as of the actual social change in Taiwan society.

3.4 Dress and makeup

Women's attire is closely related to their gender and sexual roles. The *qipao* has been referred to above as part of a self-exoticising programme designed to stress cultural difference and to attract an American male.⁷⁸ The garment carries a number of other messages in the fiction: it is endowed with meaning as both a marker of femininity and sexual allure, worn to please men, and as a marker of distance and unattainability.

In Ouyang Zi's "The Wall" the *qipao* is used as a sign that the woman is making an effort for her husband: "And sister, wearing a pretty *qipao*, having applied thick red lipstick, will open the door for him, as if greeting the emperor."⁷⁹ In Chen Ruoxi's novel, *Breaking Out*, the same applies: Meiyue's husband had persuaded her to have two *qipaos* made when they married, and still remembers the desire that they used to arouse in him, although she only wore them reluctantly. Now that their marriage is on the rocks, he observes that she has ordered a new one, "probably purely in order to please him." (7)

It appears more often, however, in the context of men being able to watch, but not to touch: in Chen Ruoxi's "Burning night"⁸⁰ an estranged husband watches his wife slip out of her *qipao*, undoing buttons, pulling down the zip and letting it slide down to the floor to

⁷⁶ Chen Ruoxi, "Lukou" 路口 (The Crossroads) translated in Kao, ed., *Crossroads*, 15-76.

⁷⁷ Chen Ruoxi "Zouchu xiyu mengmeng" 走出细雨蒙蒙 (Walking out of the drizzling mist), *Wang Zuo*, 7-16.

⁷⁸ "An entire study can (sic) easily be written on the topos of selecting dress/make-up as a form of cultural identity negotiation in *liuxuesheng wenxue* (overseas student literature)." Cynthia Sau-ling Wong, "'Astronaut Wives' and 'Little Dragons': Identity Negotiations by Diasporic Chinese Women in Two Popular Novels of the 1980s," in Wang Ling-chi and Wang Gungwu eds. *The Chinese Diaspora: Selected Essays Volume 1*. (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1998), 150.

⁷⁹ Ouyang Zi, "Qiang" 牆 (The Wall), *Autumn Leaves*, 38.

⁸⁰ Chen Ruoxi, "Ranshao de ye" 燃烧的夜晚 (Burning night), *Chen Ruoxi zixuan ji*, 141.

reveal her black slip and snow white calves. The crazed husband of Ouyang Zi's "Vase" watches his wife as she "took out a purple *qipao* with flower designs, a dress ordered two years before especially for their wedding, and a special favourite of [his]. . . [She] loosened her chemise, let it fall to the ground, and stood there, almost completely naked. Shi shifted his gaze. Gracefully, taking her time, Feng put on her slip and the *qipao*. She twisted herself into the *qipao* and made it fit closely to every part of her voluptuous body."⁸¹

In the fiction of Chen Ruoxi set in the United States, the *qipao* is more of a cultural marker than an erotic garment, and the emphasis is on subtlety and modesty, perhaps because the bodies on which it appears are generally those of older married women. The narrator of "We're going to Reno"⁸² casts a critical eye on the short, tight *qipao* being worn by a middle-aged woman newly arrived in the US from the PRC, "almost a mini-skirt" (it probably belonged to one of the ex-wives of the overseas Chinese old man she is marrying), recommending that she should order new ones from Taiwan. (39) The narrator of "Inside Outside" is "pleased to note that [her female guests], without consultation, had all chosen Chinese outfits." For tactical reasons she herself wears a looser-fitting form of traditional dress, for "Mrs Xiao had a reputation for excess in both make-up and dress, and thus the best way to beat her at her own game was to head in the opposite direction: no makeup or jewellery." It was a good tactic, as her rival "wore a floor-length black *qipao* of black satin, with earrings, bracelets and a necklace so dazzling that she glowed like a pearl. Wenhui was much relieved that she hadn't worn a *qipao* too, since she would have lost out to Mrs Xiao in a dressing contest." Only her husband is disappointed, for he thinks his wife's dress makes her look like an old lady from the countryside (*Taiwan xiangxia de obasan*).⁸³

Subtlety and refinement in a woman's make-up preoccupies a number of characters, and is often fashioned by the narrators as a uniquely Chinese restraint. The protagonist of "Dating"⁸⁴ takes care not to put on too much powder before her date, "afraid that if she applied too much white, people wouldn't be able to tell she was of the yellow race [黃種人]." (3) In the later version of the same story, rather than fearing that heavy makeup might be interpreted as an attempt to disguise her ethnicity, Meilian's light touch demonstrates a healthy naturalism which sets her off against her American peers: "She couldn't understand why American girls wore such heavy makeup, applying layer after layer of powder as if they

⁸¹ Ouyang Zi, "Huaping" 花瓶 (Vase), *Autumn Leaves* 61-62.

⁸² Chen Ruoxi, "Women shang leinuo qu" 我們上雷諾去 (We're going to Reno), *A Daughter's Home*, 27-44.

⁸³ Chen Ruoxi, "Chengli chengwai" 城里城外 (Inside Outside), *Inside Outside* 64-65, translation from Kao, ed., *Crossroads*, 124-126.

⁸⁴ Ouyang Zi, "Yue hui" 約會 (Dating), *Modern Literature*, 1-13. Later revision: "Kaoyan" 考驗 (The Test), *Autumn Leaves* 89-104.

were painting a wall. To damage a healthy, pretty skin like that was simply a shame!" (95) The protagonist of Li Li's "Two Cities"⁸⁵ comments on how refreshing it was to see a smart but simply dressed Taiwanese woman, "not tall, but slim and perfectly proportioned, with white skin and dark hair", comparing this favourably with the tall, leggy blondes of LA, their skins burned a red brown, always in casual clothes: "I've seen enough of them." (37)

A truly classical Chinese beauty, as epitomised by the protagonist of Chen Ruoxi's "The Crossroads,"⁸⁶ is simple and elegant and does not wear makeup, or only a subtle touch of it: "Wenxiu was short in height, yet her face was large and round. Imitating Auntie's style, her thick, black hair was combed into a coiffure with a topknot, resting on her head like a phoenix. By doing so, she had increased her height a few inches. Her willow-shaped brows were painted into arched crescents. She wore no other makeup or lipstick. Though slightly pale, her face revealed a kind of dignified elegance. (23)

Chinese refinement is not depicted as universal or innate, but as an acquired cultural trait. In Chen's fiction Taiwanese characters are generally more elegant than those from the People's Republic. It is new arrivals who fall into the trap of adapting to American customs and smothering themselves in makeup: those who do (most often from the mainland) are described in a particularly harsh fashion by the more sophisticated narrators (usually from Taiwan). An elderly overseas Chinese describes the transformation of a recent arrival from the PRC: "She's changed dramatically! When she first got to America she had a head of soup noodles for hair, box-pleated skirts grey as ditchwater, with leather shoes with the toes cut off - as rusticated as you like! Last time I saw her, hey, she had permed hair, red lipstick, high heeled shoes... as far as following fashion goes, I'd say she's up on a level with those from Taiwan!" The narrator quickly interjects, to set the record straight: "What are you saying? These years the fashion among students from Taiwan is *not* to wear make up!"⁸⁷ The narrator of *Foresight* also comments pityingly on her mainland friend's "strange looking *qipao*." (204) Many characters from the mainland are described as having particularly dark skin. Lacking the requisite elegance of a pale complexion, they seem destined to lose either way: "to disguise her dark complexion, she covered her face with a thick layer of white powder, making it look like a mask in a Japanese opera.... her wrinkles cracked through the barrier of facial powder, spreading out like a fish net."⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Li Li "Shuang cheng" 雙城 (Two cities), *The Floating World*.

⁸⁶ Chen Ruoxi, "Lukou" 路口 (The Crossroads) translated in Kao ed., *Crossroads*, 15-76.

⁸⁷ Chen Ruoxi "Women shang leinuo qu" 我們上雷諾去 (We're going to Reno), *Wang Zuo*, 33-34..

⁸⁸ Chen Ruoxi, "Xiangzhe Taipingyang bi'an" 向著太平洋彼岸 (On the Other Side of the Pacific), translated in Kao ed., *Crossroads*, 79-152, 88

3.4.1 The political aspects of dress

Some of Chen Ruoxi's characters politicize the issue of dress: the protagonist of "The Crossroads"⁸⁹ had grown apart from her husband partly because of his political views: "To her disappointment, she found that several Taiwanese independence activists . . . intentionally or unintentionally, felt a supposed superiority for having assimilated Japanese culture." (31) An example of this is the fact that her husband "thought that the tight, airless kimonos, which hindered a woman's movement, revealed much more of a woman's femininity than the traditional Chinese *qipao*." (30)

Chen Ruoxi's Cultural Revolution fiction features a number of female characters who exercise resistance to the oppressive system through the details of their clothes and physical appearance. In its erasure of all individuality, Cultural Revolution China deprived both men and women of sexual difference. Women's attire was an obvious target: "gendered tastes in hairstyle and dress were coerced into a monotonous uniformity of shape and colour. A kind of androgyny, a sexual sameness, based on the defeminization of female appearance and its approximation to male standards of dress, seemed to be the socialist ideal."⁹⁰ Chen's sympathetic first-person female narrators are most often complimentary about the appearance of women who dress in bright, attractive clothes. However, they themselves remain cautious observers, aware of the subversive potential of dress: "It takes a lot of nerve to wear such bright colours."⁹¹ "[Her] manner of dressing was tantamount to rebellion, [risking charges of] infatuation with vanity, or pursuing a bourgeois lifestyle."⁹² "[She] showed a great deal of nerve in dressing so conspicuously and parading around. . . . It was easy to understand why she was looked upon as an immoral person."⁹³

Chen's texts reveal the tension between the emancipation of women in socialist China from some forms of sex discrimination, and the concomitant suppression of women (and men) in terms of their freedom of expression, played out in the field of women's clothing. Both women and the state used a discourse on clothing to generate social and political messages. Parallels can be found in wartime and post-war Britain, where young women munition workers' demonstration of their newly-acquired autonomy through the purchase and display of clothing were subject to censorious social critique, and where

⁸⁹ Chen Ruoxi, "Lukou" 路口 (The Crossroads) translated in Kao ed., *Crossroads*, 16-76.

⁹⁰ Evans, *Women and Sexuality in China*, 2. See also 134-136.

⁹¹ Chen Ruoxi, "Jingjing de shengri" 晶晶的生日 (Jing Jing's Birthday), translated as "Chairman Mao is a Rotten Egg," *The Execution of Mayor Yin*, 91.

⁹² Chen Ruoxi, "Ding Yun," translated in *The Execution of Mayor Yin*, 82.

⁹³ Chen Ruoxi, "Cha hukou" 查户口 (Residency Check), 55-76, translated in *The Execution of Mayor Yin*, 104.

women's post-war fashions implied a rejection of rejection of Labour's post-war austerity policy, sending political messages about state interference in civil society.⁹⁴

3.5 Sexual Relations

There is no place for life-affirming sex in Ouyang Zi's fictional world: none of her characters finds satisfaction of personal and sexual desire. Marriages are riven with conflicts, and the only sex that is directly referred to is extramarital and depraved: in "Approaching Dusk"⁹⁵ with a series of young men of the protagonist's son's age, in "Woman Possessed"⁹⁶ with a deeply unworthy lover. "Autumn Leaves,"⁹⁷ the only story featuring mutual spiritual and physical attraction, describes the heated passion of a sexual embrace, but the protagonist tears herself away: the relationship is taboo.

Li Li's fiction does not highlight or problematise sex. Sexual issues, for adult protagonists, are not related in any way to national or cultural identity concerns. Within marriage, sex is referred to a "god-given pleasure" (天倫之樂 *tianlunzhile*), which both husband and wife look forward to after a period of separation.⁹⁸ Male characters are anxious that they should satisfy their partners sexually: "He put in all his . . . passion. . . . into her body. All he wanted was to make [her] happy."⁹⁹ The protagonist of *The Fall of a City* fears that his sexual performance the night before had not been particularly impressive, and wonders whether his partner might have faked her satisfaction: "Once again he discovered his weakness in this respect - perhaps a weakness common to all men - so lacking in confidence, so vulnerable to being shattered by a single blow, ultimately rendered so helplessly dependent on the affirmation of women in this matter." (36) Sex is a healing experience for the protagonist of *Letters from a Floating World*: she has had a mastectomy, but her lover makes her feel sexually whole again. (62, 143-146)

Chen Ruoxi's treatment of sexuality in rural Taiwan is discussed above. In her Cultural Revolution fiction, society is sexually repressive, both according to traditional conservative morality and in newly political ways. Chen's stories indicate sympathy for self-expression and sexual freedom: her narrators are generally conservative themselves, but they are adamantly opposed to the state using sexist oppression to condemn women: of a woman

⁹⁴ See Angela Woolacott, "Dressed to Kill: Clothes, Cultural Meaning and First World War Munitions Workers" and Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, "Women under Austerity: Fashion in Britain during the 1940s", in Moira Donald and Linda Hurcome, eds. *Representations of Gender from Prehistory to the Present*. Hampshire and London, Macmillan, 2000.

⁹⁵ Ouyang Zi, "Jin huanghun shi" 近黄昏時 (Approaching Dusk), *Autumn Leaves*, 121-136.

⁹⁶ Ouyang Zi, "Mo nü" 魔女 (Woman Possessed), *Autumn Leaves*, 165-182.

⁹⁷ Ouyang Zi, "Qiu ye" 秋葉 (Autumn Leaves), *Autumn Leaves*, 201-230.

⁹⁸ Li Li, "Two cities," *The Floating World*, 40.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

who is charged with political dissidence, and of sleeping with foreigners: "How could she be charged with anything concerning her private life?"¹⁰⁰ Self-reflexive first-person narrators refrain from judgement on sexual matters, with an ambiguous mixture of approbation and reservation. In "Residency Check"¹⁰¹ the narrator reserves judgement on a woman who is condemned and denied Party membership for having an extramarital affair, aware that she is really being persecuted because of the jealousy and envy of other members of the housing complex. The narrator of "My friend Aifen" decides that "everyone has a right to pursue their own happiness," in the context of Aifen's "free" lifestyle, which involves sleeping with both her ex-husband and a new lover.¹⁰² The narrator of "Ding Yun"¹⁰³ refers to herself as "of a weaker mould," than her friend, who manipulates her relationships in order to change her residency status, commenting that "Even during the Cultural Revolution, it was rare of girls of [the narrators] family background . . . to get into the habit of . . . being free about sex."

"The Tunnel"¹⁰⁴ is an unreservedly sympathetic account of the love between two elderly people. The male protagonist is resentful of the hypocrisy of the Party, which introduced new marriage laws but still in fact preserved many old attitudes: "In this respect the New Society was still very tradition-bound; it gave no thought to the loneliness of the old and their needs." (56-57) Both the Party and his own family is extremely discouraging of a romantic relationship between the protagonist and a woman who, as a divorcee, is viewed with general suspicion: when she is sexually harassed "members of the committee all took the position that [she] must have encouraged the man in some way." Their love is depicted in the narrative as healthy and beautiful: "[She] felt as shy as a young girl when she came up to him. Her legs had never been exposed to the sun, and they were white and smooth like radishes that had just been washed and taken out of the water. [He] stared at them a while and then feasted his eyes on her bare arms, round and smooth like lotus roots. He could hardly take his eyes off her." (60-61) The story ends tragically, when the two are inadvertently locked into a tunnel where they have sought out privacy: it won't be opened for another two weeks.

In "Spring Comes Late"¹⁰⁵ an elderly man confesses that "privately, he still liked to look at young women: he longed to exchange a few words with them, or even hold their

¹⁰⁰ Chen Ruoxi "Lukou" 路口 (The Crossroads) translated in Kao ed., *Crossroads*, 50-51

¹⁰¹ Chen Ruoxi, "Residency Check," translated in *The Execution of Mayor Yin*, 104.

¹⁰² Chen Ruoxi, "Nüyou Aifen" 女友艾芬 (My Friend Aifen), *Laoren*, translated in *The Old Man*, 110.

¹⁰³ Chen Ruoxi, Ding Yun 丁雲 Ting Yun, *Laoren*, translated in George Kao ed., *Two Writers and the Cultural Revolution: Lao She and Chen Jo-hsi*, Hong Kong: Renditions, 1980, 140.

¹⁰⁴ Chen Ruoxi, Didao 地道 (The Tunnel), translated in *The Old Man*, 45-62.

¹⁰⁵ Chen Ruoxi, Chunchi 春遲 (Spring comes late), *Laoren*, 89-108.

hands for a little bit. His legs would still get pins and needles when he bumped into a flirtatious woman.” (97) He forgets himself on one occasion, becoming transfixed by the plump swaying behind of a middle-aged woman at the market, and asks her if she’d go to bed with him (91-92). He is heavily criticized in numerous “struggle sessions,” but the story ends positively, with the man having gained a rakish popularity: “After a year had passed, old Qi had become the most popular partner for a chat among the old women of the neighbourhood.” (107).

Whereas in her Cultural Revolution fiction Chen is generally affirmative about sexual expression, in the sexually liberal United States, where there are no repressive forces, her fiction problematises sexual matters in terms of Chinese versus American cultural norms and identities. Open display of sexual behavior is depicted as embarrassing for Chinese characters, even where that sexual context is within marriage and not disruptive of moral values. A father recounts:

“When he remembered seeing the intimacy between his son-in-law and daughter for the first time, he still felt embarrassed. . . . When his son-in-law came home from work, he held his wife tightly in his arms the instant he saw her; he kissed her and bit her, and would not separate himself from her body for a long time. Tongfu had been married for over forty years. He could also be passionate with his wife, after the lights were out; but in front of other people, they had never even held each other’s hands.”¹⁰⁶

The protagonist of *Foresight* is embarrassed to see her employers kissing and hugging each other. “She had always felt that closeness between a man and a woman, be it spiritual or physical, should be a most private affair, conducted away from the view of outsiders, behind closed doors.” (24-25)

The importance of sex is also questioned by Chinese protagonists, particularly female characters. Concerns like the following, expressed by a female character in *Breaking Out*, feature in so many of Chen’s works that the voice of the author can be inferred:

Many American ideas were different from Chinese ones, were even completely opposed. . . . Sexual liberation for example. Americans were controlled and influenced by a mass media which massively exaggerated sex. It had become the most important thing in life, *the most significant criterion on which a marriage was judged*. People were free to seek satisfaction however they wanted. Films, television, magazines, adverts.... They were all selling sex, promoting sex, giving excuses for extra-marital sex. *People’s attitudes to sex had become a tool to judge how mature they were, how much they kept up with the times*” (89) [my italics]

¹⁰⁶ Chen Ruoxi, “Green Card,” translated in Kao ed., *Crossroads*, 249-50.

The character who voices the above comment is reassessing her own marriage in the light of the fact that her husband is having an affair. A female friend advises her that a wife's most important role within a marriage is to enable a man "to feel confident, to feel that he can sexually satisfy a woman, give her an orgasm." This friend laughs at her innocence when she replies, "But I've never had one..." "Ai, you can pretend, can't you!" (166) She admits to never having had an orgasm herself, but that she always makes her husband feel good by putting on a great show. Their own satisfaction is not an issue for either woman: sex is not a criterion of a successful marriage for them, except as a tool for keeping their husbands from straying.¹⁰⁷ (164-167) A man's sexual needs are understood as a given, but a woman's are secondary; the institution of marriage is the only thing to which they attach importance.

Yet while sexual satisfaction is never something that Chen's first-person female narrators need or want for themselves, her fiction does present some sympathy for and understanding of sexual needs. In "The Woman from Guizhou"¹⁰⁸ an elderly overseas Chinese man has imported a wife from rural China to "satisfy his everyday and sexual needs." (193) She is not happy in the United States, and although he keeps her with him through emotional blackmail, he does attempt to make some accommodation for her. Even though he feels that: "For life to be fun and fulfilling, 'that' should not be the only thing that's needed to keep it going," he appreciates her need for sexual relations, introducing her to and tolerating the occasional visits of a lover once he becomes impotent himself. (198) As with Chen's early stories from Taiwan, this tacit acceptance of a woman's sexual needs is presented through the mediation of a male narrative perspective.

It is rare to see in modern Chinese fiction the sympathetic treatment of the sexual needs of older people, as portrayed in "The Tunnel," "Spring Comes Late" and "The Woman from Guizhou." In spite of the conservatism of her first person narrators, Chen clearly does want to negotiate, to a limited degree, an opening up of very conservative attitudes to sex. The narrator of "Twenty Thousand Dollars Less..."¹⁰⁹ is aware that her "mixed feelings of revulsion and envy" at the thought of her Cantonese neighbour's sex life are "unjustifiable and despicable." (306)

Paper Marriage is Chen's boldest attempt to "keep up with the times" through addressing the topic of homosexuality. The novel presents a range of Chinese opinions on

¹⁰⁷ This topic has often been subject to feminist scrutiny in the West: the "sex comedy" of women faking orgasms so as not to offend their partners' egos, to hurry up the sex act, or in order to catch a man. Anne Koedt, *Radical Feminism*, (New York: Quadrangle, 1972).

¹⁰⁸ Chen Ruoxi, *Guizhou nuren* 貴州女人 (The Woman from Guizhou), *The Woman from Guizhou*, translated in Kao ed., *Crossroads*, 173-200.

¹⁰⁹ "Bu renshu liangwanyuan de hua" 不人數兩萬元的話 (Twenty Thousand Dollars Less...), translated in Kao ed., *Crossroads*, 119-128.

the issue of homosexuality, ranging from indifferent acceptance to abhorrence. Yet while the portrayal of Sean, a gay American man, is sympathetic, this is only in so far as his sexual identity is denied at every turn. When Pingping sees him with his arm around a boyfriend's shoulder, she interprets it as "like someone comforting a younger brother, or like old comrades-in-arms." She is disgusted by his boyfriend's overt sexuality: "He looks too feminine. . . . A woman looking sexy is acceptable, but it looks artificial and disgusting when a man attempts to bewitch through artifice." She feels compromised and upset when Sean allows himself to be hugged and kissed: "What's the matter with him?"(89)

The fact that Sean, who has AIDS, is concerned to promote safe sex and monogamy leads Pingping to decide that "What he wants is basically still the same as a normal heterosexual relationship," (128) and that he will, therefore, be drawn back into the fold, like a prodigal son. (129, 263-264) Homosexuality, to Pingping, means promiscuity; monogamy means heterosexuality; the fundamental issue of the experience of sexual desire for a member of the same sex is elided completely in her narrative. Like the female characters described above who feel that sex should not be the most important thing in a marriage, the narrator, Pingping, cannot understand why a person would "choose" a marginal sexual identity, or personal satisfaction over the familial and social: "In order to make his own choice, [he] has sacrificed both his relationship with his parents and the possibility of marriage. But what has he got out of it in the end? What is really most important to him?"(56)

The dénouement of the novel sees Sean designating Pingping his "dearest wife" in his will. His boyfriend commits suicide: the homosexuals both "disappear." Analysis of "disappearing women" in fiction and drama has been used by feminist critics to indicate the dominant (male-centred) concern of a story in spite of the ostensible subject being the "disappearing woman," who "usually dies or suffers terribly after her disappearance; the male figure is usually involved in her disappearance and is also implicated in her death or suffering; and any suffering that he may experience as a result of her disappearance is of a lesser degree than hers."¹¹⁰ Chen's novel, read in this light, functions less as an exploration of homosexuality than as a depiction of a Chinese woman asserting the primacy of the structural institution of marriage above all else. It presents as successful a sexless marriage

¹¹⁰ See Bonnie S McDougall, "Disappearing Women and Disappearing Men in May Fourth Narrative: A Post-Feminist Survey of Short Stories by Mao Dun, Bing Xin, Ling Shuhua and Shen Congwen" in *Fictional Authors, Imaginary Audiences: Modern Chinese Literature in the Twentieth Century* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2003), 133-170, esp 133-134. McDougall demonstrates that a reading of a Lu Xun's story, "The New-Year Sacrifice," apparently about the tragedy of the female subject of the narrative, is in fact more a treatise on the inadequacy of China's new male intellectuals of the 1910s and 1920s.

that was entered into only in order to secure residency rights for the Chinese “wife,” and which involves the denial and erasure of the sexual identity of the homosexual “husband.”

This is a pattern that can be seen in a number of Chen’s stories. For her female characters, sex is simply not an issue. Heterosexuality is always assumed, and sexual identity is never questioned. Generally, the latter is also true of Ouyang Zi and Li Li’s fiction: both make only the slightest reference to the existence of alternative sexualities. The suggested homosexual relationship of the two young men in “Approaching Dusk,”¹¹¹ and the latent homosexuality that could be indicated in the teacher’s affection for his male pupil in “The Last Class”¹¹² is not explored in any way in Ouyang Zi’s two stories.¹¹³ The “special8 circumstances”(110) of the brother of the protagonist in Li Li’s “Moon Over West River”¹¹⁴ are an indicator of his homosexuality. Again, this is not explored in any detail; his brother feels sorry for him: “I already have limited enough choices, but he’s even more to be pitied, he doesn’t even have any control over his physiological condition [生理狀況 *shengli zhuangkuang*],” while his brother’s girlfriend always feels a sense of unease when meeting him, as if there is something “not quite right.” (110)

¹¹¹ Ouyang Zi, “Jin huanghun shi” 近黃昏時 (Approaching Dusk), *Autumn Leaves*, 121-136.

¹¹² Ouyang Zi, “Zuihou yijie ke” 最後一節課 (The Last class), *Autumn Leaves*, 151-164.

¹¹³ After discussing “The Last Class” with Ouyang Zi, Sally Lindfors agreed that this aspect was “not worth including in the analysis:” although there is a physical attraction for the boy, any ‘apparent’ homosexuality is more frustrated heterosexuality, caused by the teacher’s traumatic rejection by a woman. Lindfors “Private lives,” Footnote 7, 295.

¹¹⁴ Xue Li [Li Li], “Xijiang yue” 西江月 (Moon Over West River), *The Last Night Train*, 101-128.

Chapter 4: Gender

Feminist formulations of the distinction between sex and gender in the 1970s accepted sex as a biological given, and gender as the social and cultural assumptions that were attached to that natural biological division of humans into male and female. The gender attributes that were assigned to the female sex were frequently defined as detrimental to women, ensuring her subordination to men and the maintenance of an unjust power structure, but the inviolability of the biological categories was not questioned. This distinction between sex and gender has been radically critiqued in the last two decades. Feminist theorists have demonstrated that the anatomically sexed body is itself socially constructed: that it is gender that informs and maintains the two-sex model of humanity.¹

Biological sex is allocated by the possession of definitive physical and physiological markers, usually defined by recourse to the appearance of the external genitalia at birth. The sex distinction is fundamental to our entry into the social world: as soon as a child is born it is sexed. Most people are equipped with either one or the other set of clustered physical and physiological markers that are used to define male and female, but the medical and social treatment of the minority of the population (once known as hermaphrodites but more recently termed “intersex”) who do not fit this standard distribution show the discursive impossibility of thinking outside the cultural binary that has determined categorisation of humans into two distinct sexes. Judith Butler draws on the writing of Simone Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*: “one is not born a woman, but rather *becomes* one” and Monique Wittig, who argues that sex is a sophisticated and mythic “imaginary formation,” in her formulation of “performative” gendered identities.² Butler argues that it is normative *sexuality* which fortifies normative gender: “acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality.”³

The undermining of the sex/gender distinction is illuminating, and proposes a challenge to feminist scholars who, by failing to problematise sexual categories, might be seen to reinforce them. The social reality of embodied men and women is, however, still dominated by the conventional division of the sexes. In order to think and speak about the politics of the lived experiences of self-identified women, the category must be used, even if

¹ Kathryn Backett-Milburn and Linda McKie eds., *Constructing Gendered Bodies* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave, 2001).

² Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 141f.

understood as contingent: Butler herself concedes that “within feminism, it seems as if there is some political necessity to speak as and for *women*, and I would not contest that necessity.”⁴ My analysis of the operation of gender in the work of three women writers accepts that gender determines sex, but focuses on gender primarily in terms of the cultural distinctions it makes between masculinity and femininity, the social roles that are differentially assigned to men and women, and the effects of patriarchy on women.

This chapter considers the authors in terms of their specific identity as “women writers,” and undertakes an investigation of gender issues in their work, both where they are explicitly negotiated and where they are a peripheral or unexamined feature of the texts. The employment of male versus female narrators is examined for the effect that the sex of the narrator has on the themes and plots of stories. Fictional deliberations which both embrace and problematize women’s traditional roles in relation to men and family are also examined.

4.1 Gendered Writers

Critical analyses of the work of the generation of women writers from Taiwan to which Ouyang Zi, Chen Ruoxi and Li Li belong tend to downplay gender, perhaps in order to avoid marginalisation of women in the newly-forming canon of Taiwanese literature:⁵

They have enjoyed an educational opportunity equal to men’s, . . . and have furthermore procured for themselves an elite status by overcoming various hidden forms of discrimination perpetuated in the family and society at large. They zealously assimilate orthodox values and standards of the intellectual community . . . and deliberately dissociate themselves from negative images culturally linked with femininity.⁶

The validation of gender neutrality and universality in women writers is a consequence and propagation of the common assumption that gender (or, more commonly, women’s) issues are not of universal concern. Praise of such writing is implicitly revealing of a negative evaluation of “women’s literature,” frequently derided either for its excessive femininity or its aggressively feminist stance. According to Susan Brownmiller:

“writing in feminine. . . . refers to the stereotype, to sentimental prose . . . vapid and suffocatingly enclosed. A feminine sentence is said to gush rather than roar; it lacks muscle

³ Ibid, 173.

⁴ Judith Butler, “Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the ‘Question of Postmodernism’” in Judith Butler and Joan W Scott, eds., *Feminists Theorize the Political* (London: Routledge, 1993), 15.

⁵ They are classed as the “middle generation” in the conventional three-part division of postwar Taiwan writers into generations: “The older generation were already adults . . . in 1949; most of them were born on the mainland The middle generation were educated after the war and started their literary careers in the 1960s when the modernist influence was at its height. The younger generation are the postwar baby boomers who . . . became active during the 1980s” in Carver and Chang eds., *Bamboo Shoots*, xvi.

⁶ Carver and Chang eds., *Bamboo Shoots*, xx.

and lean strength; it is precious and insubstantial; . . . inferior and weak. . . . When it seeks to break from its mold and be strongly declarative it is said to . . . become strident and shrill.”⁷

The three writers of this study have indeed each sought not to be labelled as “women writers,” particularly in the early stages of their careers. All of their pen-names are gender neutral, and early critics occasionally refer to the authors as male, before the individuals became more widely known and identified as women. This was a sensible strategy to avoid being trivialized: Taiwanese women writers are often marginalised by Taiwanese literary critics who define women’s literature as narrow, romantic, domestic, feminine or otherwise non-universal. Critic Lü Zhenghui, for example, equates women’s literature with boudoir literature and maintains that it is “literature by women for women, who are primarily high school or college students,” characterized by sentiments of “purity and idealization” and aimed at “titillating the desires of young girls wishing for self-fulfillment rather than serving the true function of literature,” which is to “reflect present social reality.”⁸ Yü Tiancong describes 1950-1980s women’s literature as “too narrow.” But in seeking to take up an active position in the cultural field, and to avoid marginalization, women writers often find themselves actively participating in the discourses which devalue a specifically female perspective:

It may well be that women play a major role in reproducing meanings that do not serve their won purposes or express their own perspectives. They are fully aware that female perspectives are not viewed as commonly held (indeed, are often not recognised at all) and, in the interests of facilitating communication, they allow men to continue to believe that a distinctively male view of things is not particular but universal.⁹

Ou-yang Zi stresses objectivity in the craft of fiction and describes her approach to her writing as that of a neutral, rational, somewhat detached observer of humanity.¹⁰ Neither she nor her critics have discussed her position as a “woman writer”; many critics specifically deny that there is a gendered or sociological aspect to her work: “Ou-yang Zi is more interested in the empirical process of storytelling than in the epistemological question involved in the human perception of reality.”¹¹ Ouyang Zi has, however, written about her

⁷ Susan Brownmiller, *Femininity* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1984), 124-125.

⁸ Lü Zhenghui 呂正惠, “Guixiu wenxue de shehui wenti” 閨秀文學的社會問題 (The social problems of boudoir literature) in *Xiaoshuo yu shehui* 小說與社會 (Fiction and society) (Taipei: Lienjing, 1992), 135-51. Yü Tiancong, 尉天聰 “Taiwan funü wenxue de kunjing” (The predicament of Taiwan women’s literature) 台灣婦女文學的困境 in Zi Wanyu 子婉玉 ed. *Fengqi yinyong de nüxing zhuyi piping* 風氣雲湧的女性主義批評 (Taipei: Gufeng, 1988), 243-53.

⁹ Sally McConnell-Ginet, “The Sexual (Re)production of meaning: A discourse-based theory” in Deborah Cameron, ed., *The Feminist Critique of Language: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998), 198.

¹⁰ Ouyang Zi, Introduction to *The Long-haired Girl*, 3.

¹¹ Chang, *Modernism and the Nativist Resistance*, 38, 42, 47.

childhood, indicating that she was brought up with a very traditional conception of womanhood: she describes her mother as a “typical woman of the generation above us. She gave her life completely to her husband and children, dedicating herself heart and soul to managing the home, identifying herself only with her roles as ‘wife’ and ‘mother.’” She describes experiencing an “enlightenment” when she discovered that not all women were as self-abnegating as her mother was.¹² It is my contention that Ouyang Zi’s explorations of the individual psyche do in fact display a strong thematic concern with the complexity of relationships between the sexes, and that there are easily identifiable conventional gender tropes underlying many of her characters’ psychological conflicts and neuroses, particularly that of the psychological “erasure” of the self-abnegating woman. A feminist approach to the reading of these stories looks at the gender discourses that underlie the psychologies of the protagonists as a significant part of the meaning of the stories, along the lines adopted by Rey Chow’s in her reading of Ling Shuhua’s fiction: “I am not saying that Chinese women ‘want to be victimised,’ but that the unavailability of an alternative, be it an external fact *or a psychological perception*, [my italics] should be taken seriously as a way into the problem of their oppression.”¹³

Neither Chen Ruoxi nor her critics have paid much attention to gender-related themes in her early or Cultural Revolution literature: Chen’s Cultural Revolution stories defined her as a political writer, with universal concerns. This is how she too defined herself. She wanted to depict a “cross-section of Chinese society”: gender is not mentioned when she states that “Writers, like artists, should not be limited by region or nationality. Artistic works are utterly internationalist . . . encompass subjects of basic human significance . . . universal. . . .”¹⁴ In the 1980s critics noted and Chen acknowledged the fact that her novels and recent fiction were beginning to feature more specifically gendered concerns, such as family and marital relationships, but she assured them that they were right to continue sensing “very powerful political implications” in her work.¹⁵ It is only in her latest work, of the 1990s, that Chen has adopted something resembling an explicitly feminist politics: in the introduction to *A Daughter’s Home* she writes that she has discovered that women’s experiences are very similar all over the world, regardless of nationality, class and educational background, and that in spite of women’s equality before the law in China,

¹² Ouyang Zi, “Wo de muqin” 我的母親 [My Mother] *Shengming de guiji* 生命的軌跡 (The track of life) (Taipei: Jiuge chubanshe, 1988), 71, 75.

¹³ Rey Chow, “Virtuous Transactions: A reading of three stories by Ling Shuhua,” Tani E. Barlow ed., *Gender politics in Modern China: Writing and Feminism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 91.

¹⁴ Chen Ruoxi, “Homeland and New Land”, prologue to Kao ed., *Crossroads*, 12.

¹⁵ Chen Ruoxi, Introduction to *Foresight*, 3.

Hong Kong and Taiwan, women are still not equal to men in Chinese society. Chen commits herself to exploring the ramifications of this inequality: "This collection of short stories records the experiences of a few women in search of a place they really belong. If it can inspire contemplation . . . , I will be absolutely delighted."¹⁶

In an interview in 1989 Li Li was informed by her interlocutor that "many people don't think of your work as typical of 'women's writing'" and asked what she thought about the term "woman writer." Li Li admitted: "A few years ago, in the 'arrogance of my youth,' I would protest as soon as I heard the words!" Now, however, she is more relaxed about the appellation: although she sees herself as: "a person first, and then a Chinese person, and only after that do the other roles come in, such as gender, profession, and family roles." Li Li explains that if what is meant by "women's writing" is the "boudoir literature" [閨閣氣 *guigeqi*], then her concerns are certainly much broader: "When I write, the thing that concerns me are 'people', and I don't feel I have to privilege women just because I am a woman. Nonetheless, I have in fact thought of writing about some themes which a male writer would find difficult (though not necessarily impossible) to approach; such as the question of abortion in "Snow Fields."¹⁷ In this chapter I will provide an analysis of the "erasure" of female characters in Li Li's fiction which employs a male perspective, and highlight the themes of her very occasional approach from a "female" perspective in her early work.

The two collections of letters and short prose pieces that Li Li published after 1989, the year in which her son died, show a marked change in form and style, and would certainly be classified as "women's writing;" she describes the process of grieving after losing her first child, and then an account of the birth and the first two years of a child subsequently born to her.¹⁸ Li Li states that it was the reading of literature and her recourse to creative writing that saved her from sinking into complete despair, and that her experience of grieving enabled her to achieve a style to which she had long aspired: in her subsequent fictional work she continued to write a number of works in this style, "closer to the language and expression of poetry."¹⁹

¹⁶ Chen Ruoxi, Introduction to *A Daughter's Home*, no page numbers.

¹⁷ An interview with Chen Zuchan, "Li Li de chuanguo licheng," Postscript to Li Li, *The Fall of a City*, 112-113.

¹⁸ Li Li, *Beihuai shujian* (Letters of Sorrow) (Taipei: Erya chubanshe, 1990). Li Li, *Qingtian biji* (Notes on a Fine Day) (Taipei: Lianhe wenxue, 1996). The cover of the latter advertises it as "a real and beautiful book of the heart."

¹⁹ Li Li Preface "Cong zuihou dao zuichu" (From the very end to the very beginning), *First Snow*, 9-10.

4.2 Writing Gender

Twelve of Ouyang Zi's sixteen stories are narrated from the perspective of female characters, four from the perspective of male characters. All but two of these stories feature crises precipitated directly by relations with a member of the opposite sex. Chen Ruoxi's early and Cultural Revolution fiction is evenly divided between male and female narrators. In Chen's later fiction, however, set in the United States, female narrators predominate: three of her five novels are narrated entirely from the perspective of a single female protagonist, one features two male and two female narrators, and one features two male narrators. Twenty-nine of Chen's forty-one short stories written since the Cultural Revolution stories are told from the perspective of female characters, and the thematic concerns of half of the fourteen which are narrated from the perspective of male characters feature plots which revolve around the actions and roles of the female characters in those stories. Only five of Li Li's twenty-two short stories and three novels are narrated from the perspective of female characters. Two are narrated from the perspectives of both male and female protagonists, with eighteen narrated from the perspective of male protagonists.

Ouyang Zi's writing, then, features a predominantly female perspective, as does Chen Ruoxi's, though to a lesser extent. Li Li's work is narrated from a predominantly male perspective.

4.2.1 Narrative choices: male narrators

A number of Li Li's stories feature the 'rootless' protagonist: a torn, divided, nostalgia-filled intellectual male. "Homeward Bound" is typical.²⁰ The protagonist Xia Chengzhi travels to Canton to meet his aunt, his cousin (who he last saw as a young girl when his family fled to Taiwan), and his cousin's daughter An'an, the image of her mother's younger self. Throughout the story, women serve as the inspiration and foils for Xia's feelings. His cousin, on whom he had a childhood crush, is remembered as 'clean' and 'pure', representing his childhood innocence. (32) He had proposed to his Chinese-American wife on the day he heard of his mother's death in Taiwan, his wife substituting for that supportive figure. Xia's yearning and regret, the 'Chinese knot' which makes him question his life of comfort and ease in the United States, is offset by critical observations of his American wife's pragmatism and her materialism: she serves as a contrast against which Xia's deeper sensitivities are highlighted. (9, 26, 36, 39) These subtle detractions are rendered more acute through contrast with a youthful Taiwanese graduate student, Tang

²⁰ "Jinxiang" 近鄉 (Homeward Bound), *Birds of Paradise Flowers*, 25-68.

Jing, for whom Xia develops an illicit passion: she too becomes for him a personification of his Chinese cousin as a child. (50-59) A triumphant feeling of happiness and belonging envelops Xia when he muses upon the fact that "Tang Jing, Auntie, Cousin and An'an were all living in the same time zone. And now he was here with them. He felt a warmth flow through his heart and into his eyes." (67) In the United States, Xia is forced to acknowledge that people change and modernize, but he continues to fetishize the unchanging constancy of women in China: "Thirty years! Yet there they were, still waiting for him with the bed made and the dishes warmed. They were waiting for him to return after his long voyage." (62-3). The realities of these women's experiences, the civil war and the Cultural Revolution, are forgotten, Xia preferring to dwell on the enduring, selfless domesticity of his female relatives.

"The Floating World"²¹ features another middle-aged overseas Chinese protagonist, Ningyuan, a professor of Chinese history who also feels distanced from his Chinese-American wife. He too embarks on an affair with a Taiwanese student who is half his age, Phoebe. (52) In this story, the girl serves not as a symbol of the past but of Ningyuan's distance from his homeland and the estrangement he feels with regard to her generation: Chinese youth who have grown up in Taiwan and America, who share none of the May Fourth idealism and bitter disappointments that have shaped his whole existence. (54, 58) Phoebe is a mystery to him: the colours of her clothes and the scent she gives off haunt him: "He tried to search for associations in his memory. . . he thought of the sandalwood box in his mother's bedroom . . . but it wasn't that . . . elusive and ungraspable." (60) She was "like the lights twinkling through the foliage, unreal and unstable, flickering in his small office." (62) Her body too, seems empty to him: "she had no response. . . she had no erogenous areas. Her most private parts smelled like dried flowers too, a fragrance belonging to plants but not to human animals." (76) The only time Phoebe responds to him sexually is when she tastes of the despair that he has always felt: her close friend, Joe, a male alter-ego, commits suicide after engaging with and then witnessing the dénouement of the Tiananmen protests of 1989. (84-87) Phoebe stops seeing Ningyuan after that, and experiences some sort of catharsis: "he knew all along its inevitability and meaning. She and Joe overturned the established order of his world. . . He had needed a new, irrational force to come from without; they completed him and now they each left in their own way. He could be at peace at last. Around that time, the term 'the end of history' was fashionable in his field. He couldn't help thinking that maybe a certain period of his life had also come to

an end.”(88) The symbolic role played by Phoebe and her friend Joe is that of allowing the protagonist to re-live his own commitment to and disillusionment with China.

US-based Luo Xiangzhi of Chen Ruoxi’s *Breaking Out* falls in love with a young woman from his hometown in the PRC, who represents his past in a way his current wife, from Taiwan, does not: her simple clothes, hesitant expression and strong Hangzhou accent bring to mind “the country girls of his childhood. . . . Xinxin’s body seemed to carry with it the views of the mountains and lakes of the West Lake. . . . His memories of youth and his longing for home all suddenly welled up in his heart. . . . He could even smell the earth on Xinxin’s body, fresh and clean.” (40) In this story the female protagonist is not mute: she does her best to live up to the image he has created for her: on Luo’s birthday she presents him with a traditional embroidered pouch she has made herself, which again fills him with nostalgia. (54) She keeps her hair in braids because he likes it like that: “In his memory, all the girls in Hangzhou had braids.” (74) Later, as their affair progresses and Xinxin fills out, Luo no longer finds her childlike, but rather describes her beauty as “like that of a young mother.” Xinxin jokes that she has served as a mother to him for many years (she had transcribed letters to Luo on behalf of his partially-sighted mother for ten years before she came to the US). He is pleased with this image, and “wished he could turn into an infant, and stay on this big bed with her forever.”

The hero of Li Li’s “The Last Train”²² finds that all the Chinese women he meets in the United States are somehow special: “Perhaps it was a matter of temperament, a gentle poise that both possessed, something apparently unique to Chinese women, which he had come to appreciate only after coming to the States.” (374) After he is stabbed while saving a Chinese woman from attack, she cradles his head, and in his redemptive dying moments he experiences warmth and joy in a vision of all the women in his life, dead and alive, from the mainland, from Taiwan and from the United States, coming to surround him: “Granny’s hands were feeling his forehead bathed in a cold sweat, Xiao Yu was walking towards him from an extremely faraway corner, Mother was here too - she called to him as soon as she stepped inside the house. And there was Huang Jue, her face in the soft shade of the candle light. Why were they all so sad, why did they all have tears glittering in their eyes, wasn’t he just fine? . . . He was completely at peace and contented.” (161)

²¹ “Fushi” 浮世 (The Floating World), *The Floating World* translated by Michelle Yeh in *The Chinese Pen* (Spring, 1994), 51-91.

²² “Zui hou yechē” 最後夜車 (The Last Train), *The Last Train* 129-164.

"Geng'er in Beijing,"²³ by Chen Ruoxi, is a third person narrative restricted to the consciousness of American repatriate Geng'er as he seeks to readjust to life in socialist China. Geng'er paints a very traditional picture of demure, submissive Chinese women: "American girls were ardent and unrestrained . . . there hadn't been a single one who matched the innocence, sincerity and desirability of Xiao Qing." (166) He feels his passion, "like the lava in an underground volcano, which seethed and flowed," must be tempered in order not to overwhelm Xiao Qing, the passive object of his emotions. (164) Since political constraints prevent their relationship developing, she never becomes a fully-rounded character, remaining a symbolic marker of Chinese femininity: "This girl of New China, ardent and yet solemn, gentle and yet strong, bewitched him no end." (168)

In my reading of Chen Ruoxi and Li Li's fiction featuring female narrators, below, I find that when the authors seek to portray women's lived experience through the medium of a woman's perceptions, an antagonism between nationalist and feminist concerns invariably presents itself: gender issues always arise. Male narrators, on the other hand, seem to be deliberately employed by both Li Li and Chen Ruoxi as a device to create space for an unproblematic, "neutral" focus on political, cultural or identity themes. Analysis of these "gender neutral" stories, however, as described above, reveals a dramatic change in the depiction of female characters. The well-documented phenomenon of women as symbols of the collectivity or as cultural markers of national identity and propriety can be observed: "Women are commonly constructed as the symbolic form of the nation whereas men are invariably represented as its chief agents."²⁴ Through the eyes of male narrators, female characters become mute and thinly-sketched foils that serve only to highlight the (male's) exploration of the main theme. It is in these narratives that the persisting legacy of the female-excluding "universal" (ostensibly genderless, but male-derived and male naturalized), is exposed. Bonnie McDougall identifies a similar phenomenon in May Fourth writing: she writes that is a common scenario in Chinese fiction for male writers to "focus on women to illustrate male problems."²⁵

²³ Page references to the translation, "Keng Erh in Peking" in *The Execution of Mayor Yin*.

²⁴ J. J. Pettman, *Worlding Women: A Feminist International Politics* (London: Routledge, 1996), 56. See also Rick Wilford and Robert L. Miller eds., *Women, Ethnicity and Nationalism: The Politics of Transition* (London and New York: Routledge), 1988.

²⁵ Bonnie S McDougall, "Disappearing Women and Disappearing Men," *Fictional Authors*, 160.

4.2.2 Narrative choices: female narrators

Stories that best exemplify the antagonism between nationalist and feminist concerns are those that feature the wives of the US-based Chinese men whose “nostalgia for home” leads them into the arms of young and beguiling women from that “home.” The previous chapter has described the sexualisation and “othering” of Taiwan from the perspective of residents in the United States. For an overseas Chinese woman whose husband is having an affair, Taiwanese and Chinese cannot possibly represent home, history and fond nostalgic memories; they are instead representative of a current and present danger: predatory green-card hungry husband-snatchers. Female characters are much more inclined to focus on the modern aspect of Taiwan and the PRC: to see the people and places in terms of contemporary developments rather than of the past. While on the one hand they lament the decline in moral values that has led to Taiwan becoming such a dangerous place to send their husbands to, on the other hand they discuss it in terms of the extent to which the rights and equalities which they have come to take for granted in the United States are still denied to women there. Some female characters propagate the sexualised “othering” of Taiwanese and mainland women, while others struggle to assert solidarity with women across this political divide.

Contrasting male and female perspectives on present-day Taiwan are exemplified by the husband and wife of Li Li’s “Two Cities.”²⁶ The husband, Qi Kejia, returns to Taiwan on a lecture tour, bumps into his first love and is taken back in time “as if he’d just stepped over the intervening ten years.”(22) He commences an affair: “Xiaodan’s reappearance in his life, in middle age, was like the completion of the dream of his youth.”(32) When his wife meets Xiaodan, on the other hand, she sees in her an example of the new, independent Taiwanese woman: a “genius” (人才 *rencai*) for having survived divorce and the loss of custody of her child, still planning and hoping for a brighter future. (37-39) She invites Xiaodan to come to visit them in Los Angeles. Kejia is horrified: he wants Xiaodan to stay where she belongs, in Taiwan, as part of his compartmentalised past (41). When Minghui discovers the affair, she is chagrined by her naiveté in having disregarded all the warnings she had been given about the dangers of letting a husband loose in “dangerous” Taiwan (13, 45-46, 49). Nonetheless, she makes a conscious decision not to allow herself to be swayed by discourses that would allow her to demonise and “other” Xiaodan. Instead, she approaches Xiaodan for an explanation, charging her with having undermined female solidarity. The women then bond over a discussion of their children:

²⁶ Li Li, “Shuang cheng” 雙城 [Two cities] *The Floating World*, 1-86.

“from rivals in love the two were transformed by their shared roles as mothers.” (81) Eventually, Minghui sets Xiaodan up with a Taiwanese boyfriend.

The betrayed wife in Chen’s novel *Foresight* is not nearly as conciliatory: she is unremittingly critical of women in Taiwan, and has lost any sense of solidarity with her native place as a result of her husband’s affair with a young woman in Taipei: “The women in Taiwan these days are nothing like those that we were familiar with in the fifties and sixties. They’re ruthless – they’ve really become like vipers! My marriage has . . . stumbled into one of their nests. . . . she . . . is like a cockroach after honey, desperate to catch hold of [my husband].” She had initially travelled to the United States unwillingly and had longed to return to Taiwan, but after an absence of only three years she now feels: “I could never stay on in Taipei. My female compatriots here make my heart freeze. . . . Ai, women’s rights! It’s women themselves that are women’s worst enemies!” (229-230)

Chen Ruoxi’s *Breaking Out* is divided into chapters which give voice to both the Taiwanese wife and the mainland Chinese mistress of Luo Xiangzhi, providing alternative perspectives on his perception of Li Xin as a symbol of the pure and simple past of his childhood (see above). His wife’s friend demonises Li Xin, claiming that she probably didn’t love Luo: “eighty- to ninety-percent of the girls from mainland China are only looking for a green card.”(152) Li Xin does have a friend from the mainland who is frank about using marriage as a tool for residency rights, and who urges her to press her claims on Luo in order to secure residency in the United States, (101) but Xinxin refuses to adopt that strategy, redeeming somewhat the image of women from the mainland by ending the affair and asserting female solidarity. She tells Luo that if he wants the security of marriage, he must also bear the restraints: his wife and child need him. (217-218)

The protagonist of Li Li’s “The Jews of Kaifeng City”²⁷ split up with her Taiwanese husband after he declared that they were going to move back to Taiwan, regardless of whether she wanted to or not. She suspected an affair with a student from Taiwan. “She suddenly felt herself completely destitute. . . . She had come to a foreign country with him shortly after they were married, grit her teeth and taken the hard times . . . and yet it all seemed to have been for nothing.” (75) The independence and autonomy that she has learnt to enjoy since her decision to end her marriage gives Mingjin the self-confidence to embrace the cultural traditions of her Jewish partner and his family. After a subsequent visit to Taiwan she realises that she no longer identifies with Taiwan as home: “Go home? Where was home? For so many years, in this foreign country, the home of her dreams was a long

alley, with the Japanese style house at the end, with her mother waiting with biscuits for her to get back from school. Now that home [in Taiwan] had turned into an apartment in a big block of flats . . . everybody sitting in front of the television after dinner to watch soap operas.” (94-95) Home is her own flat in California with her Jewish American husband.

The contrast between Li Li's stories which feature a concern with (male) national identity and homeward longing and the small number of Li Li's stories narrated by women, could not be greater. Abortion is a topic that Li Li explicitly chose to address as a woman writer: “The damage to a woman's body and spirit caused by abortion is, I fear, not a topic which many male writers would think to explore, is it?”²⁸ The story “Snow Fields”²⁹ describes two married women, one in mainland China, the other in the United States, both facing pressure to abort their second child. The Taiwanese woman in the United States is herself ambivalent about the pregnancy, but her husband wants her to get rid of the child. While he tells her the abortion is her decision, he implies that she is already an inadequate mother (their first child, a son, is being cared for by his parents in Taiwan) and abdicates all responsibility for the child himself: “the one who wants to keep the baby will be responsible for raising it.” (122) In the case of the woman from the PRC, whose story is told in parallel, it is the authorities who will enforce a termination under the one child policy. Her family are against the abortion, but only because they are convinced that the woman is carrying a boy. Their concern is not for the woman and her baby per se, but for the potential son or grandson that she may be carrying. Dark mutterings among the husband and grandparents indicate that they may be plotting the “accidental” death of the woman's daughter in order to secure permission for a second birth: the precedent had already been set in a neighbouring family. At the end of the story the mother, clutching her crying daughter in despair, is mirrored by her counterpart in the United States, haunted by the cries of the ghostly girl child she has aborted.

Whereas most of Li Li's male protagonists yearn for home, lament the political divide and see Chinese women as representing the essence of that home, the women in “Snow Fields” do not in any way represent their country or their people: their desires are pointedly at odds with, and their inclinations overridden by, their partner, family or country. In spite of the women's very different social and political circumstances, the presentation and structure of “Snow Fields” emphasises the common experience of the two narrators.

²⁷ Li Li, “Kaifengcheng de youtairen” 开封城的犹太人 (The Jews of Kaifeng City), *Birds of Paradise Flowers*, 69-98.

²⁸ Interview with Chen Zuchan, Postscript to Li Li, *The Fall of a City*, 112-113.

²⁹ “Xue di” 雪地 (Snow Fields), *The Last Night Train*, translated by Michelle Yeh in *Contemporary Women Writers: Hong Kong and Taiwan*, 115-130.

National and cultural identifications are eclipsed by their personal situations: in neither location (the US or mainland China), or political/cultural system (Taiwan or China), is the decision to take the life of an unborn child any easier. The Taiwanese wife's observations about her husband's preoccupation with Chinese food highlights this contrast in their sensibilities: he leaves her alone in the clinic, in search of Chinese food for his lunch: "Though he was very stubborn about food, he was indifferent about everything else. Take this abortion for instance." (121) When she emerges after the operation his reaction, as she had expected, is to say: "Let's find a Chinese restaurant and have a good meal. I'm starving! Today is completely wasted!" (128)

4.2.2.1 Apolitical politicians; bridging political divides

*"In a complex play, the state is often gendered male and the nation gendered female"*³⁰

Alienation from place of origin is a limited phenomenon in the fiction, inspired generally only by situations such as a husband's infidelity. Identification with China and/or Taiwan is generally very strong, particularly in the work of Chen Ruoxi. Female characters, however, tend to identify themselves with the greater Chinese *nation*, but not with the *state*. Women distance themselves from politics either by claiming ignorance of such matters, or by aiming to bridge political divides.

In most studies of nationalist struggle, the disadvantages of such a position are stressed. Women, in allowing themselves to be constructed as the symbolic form of the nation, renew a classic patriarchal bargain, often standing to gain little when statehood is achieved as women's issues are subsumed under the nationalist cause. Under the particular circumstances of a politically divided China, however, this discourse can be very enabling: women (real and imagined; writers and characters) find themselves occupying a locus of considerable discursive freedom by lifting themselves above the disabling political divides of greater China. Not only are they often freer to travel to either the mainland or Taiwan; they are also able to take the moral high ground, distancing themselves from the often hypocritical machinations which need to be undertaken by those who wish to ingratiate themselves with the authorities on one side of the Straits or the other.

The formal names for the political structures such as the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China on Taiwan are invariably avoided by female characters: the mainland is often 祖國 *zuguo* (literally 'ancestral country/nation' often translated as

³⁰ J. J. Pettman, *Worlding Women*, 49. My emphasis.

fatherland/motherland), while Taiwan is 家鄉 *jiaxiang* or 故鄉 *guxiang* (literally 'family' or 'old' countryside/place). Declarations of a lack of political interest and knowledge are frequent: "In Suzhen's sphere of thought, politics was only a matter for men; in Taiwan it was unusual for a woman even to serve as a councillor." (*Foresight*, 144) "She could never understand why Chinese people became so madly passionate about politics at the beginning of the 1970s." (*Breaking Out*, 120) Yet Chen's characters' avowed non-politicisation is often disingenuous: many reveal themselves to be deeply political, although they most commonly exercise their politics not through direct action but in the men that they choose to associate themselves with.

The best example of this tension between avowed apoliticality in spite of clear political commitments is featured in "The Crossroads."³¹ The protagonist, Yu Wenxiu, maintains that: "From the beginning, neither [she nor her mother] had wanted to get involved with politics and were afraid of their inability to escape from it." (26) Both have suffered negative consequences resulting from the politicisation of their husbands: the narrator's father disappeared during the white terror, and she was blacklisted as the wife of an independence activist. Nonetheless, Wenxiu is self-aware enough to acknowledge that: "It was truly ironic that the people she most admired were those involved in politics". She owns that she shared her first husband's "passionate obsession for Taiwan's future and concern for the well-being of the people." One of the reasons she grew apart from him was to do with his politics: "To her disappointment, she found that several Taiwanese independence activists . . . had various degrees of affinity for the Japanese. They intentionally, or maybe unintentionally, embraced their supposed superiority for having assimilated Japanese culture. They even acted superior to those who worshipped popular American fads." (30-31) She suspects that she fell in love with her husband out of "some sort of heroic worship" (37) and she can feel a similar situation recurring now: her unprepossessing suitor Fang Hao, who is committed to the mainland, not Taiwan, attracts her through his political rhetoric: "in spite of Fang Hao's unattractive, ageing appearance, whenever he talked about politics or speculated on China's future, he became a completely different person, high-spirited and majestic. He attracted her like a magnet." When Wenxiu begins to feel that she is in fact more politically dedicated than he is, she becomes disillusioned with him, and begins to notice other negative aspects of his personality. (70-71) Yet in choosing to reject Fang Hao's marriage proposal, which will involve accompanying him to mainland China (and thus jeopardise the possibility of returning to

³¹ Chen Ruoxi, "Lukou" 路口 (The Crossroads), *Chengli chengwai*, 85-146, translated in Kao ed., *Crossroads*.

Taiwan), Wenxiu clings to an apolitical discourse: "The reason I want to go back to Taiwan is not because it's better or worse than the mainland. If I go back, it's because it's Taiwan, my native place (家鄉 *jiexiang*)." (40)

The protagonist of "On the other side of the Pacific" defines herself in very similar ways: "Political passion was truly a mystery to Yizhen." (121) "Men are such strange animals, . . . why must they always talk about politics?" (125) Yet she too is clearly a political animal: she is proud that her brother has been engaging in political activism in Taiwan, "We Taiwanese have always been heroic and tragic." (104) Her current apolitical stance is later given as more one of pragmatism than of a fundamental disconnection with politics: "I don't want to get involved in politics. Having been through the Cultural Revolution, I believe in peaceful reform. If you really want to do something for our people, you should go back to Taiwan and work for our cause." She is hopeful for the future of Taiwan, and affirmative of the value of political action: "the people's desire for political participation will make the Nationalist government more open and democratic." (121)

Male narrators often see women from the homeland as a bridge to the past. Female narrators in a number of Chen's and Li Li's stories also see themselves as serving as a bridge, but of the present and the future: crossing the political divide. The Taiwanese protagonist of Chen's novel *The Repatriates*, who decides to stay on in the PRC, is most explicit in this regard: "The image of a bridge floated before her eyes, and she became a personification of that bridge." (384-385) Most often, the bridging role is served by a relationship between Taiwanese women and men from the PRC: the women relate to the men in terms of their current work for and political positions vis-à-vis China or Taiwan. The loneliness of the protagonist of Li Li's "The Last Night Train,"³² recently arrived from the PRC, is assuaged by a girlfriend from Taiwan: "She'd introduced herself: 'are you Chinese (中國人) too?' He'd liked that 'too' word." The Taiwanese protagonists of Chen Ruoxi's stories "The Crossroads", "On the Other Side of the Pacific" and Li Li's "The Jews of Kaifeng City"³³ all see their relationships with men from the PRC as means by which they can learn about developments in the PRC and feel close to China, using personal connection to negate the political divide. In the end, however, although they learn from these relationships, they do not follow these men back to the PRC: both of Chen's characters

³² Li Li, "Zuihou yechē" 最後夜車 (The Last Night Train), *The Last Night Train*, 133.

³³ Li Li, "Kaifengcheng de youtairen" 開封城的猶太人 (The Jews of Kaifeng City), *Birds of Paradise Flowers*, 69-98.

resolve to remain single and probably return to Taiwan, while Li Li's protagonist marries an American and remains in the United States.

While the bridge is an apolitical metaphor in the fiction discussed here, referring primarily to a bridge between the two Chinas, it is a metaphor that has been taken up by a number of overseas Chinese in America recently as part of a more explicitly political project, associated with the neo-Confucianism of Tu Wei-ming. Victor Hao Li argues that those who straddle China and the US have special roles and responsibilities: "There are points in human history when cultures and peoples cross old boundaries and build new ties at especially rapid rates and in important ways, and in the process civilizations are transformed. We are at one of those points. . . . We are the bridges who will help bring about the Pacific era and build a global community and a New World Order."³⁴

4.2.2.2 Transmitters of cultural traditions

Women's role in the nation is often defined by their social function as "intergenerational transmitters of cultural traditions, customs, songs, cuisine, and, of course, the mother-tongue."³⁵ These roles are embraced by many of Chen's protagonists. Almost every sympathetic female character relishes cooking Chinese food (particularly Taiwanese specialties), and remembers with fondness their home traditions. The protagonist of "The Crossroads" feels homesick for the weather, the festivities and the music troupes of rural Taiwan. (62-64). She tells her suitor: "I constantly think of returning to Taiwan to see my sister and offer incense to the Goddess of Mercy. I'd really like to chat with my relatives and old neighbours." (47) The story ends with her humming a nostalgic Taiwanese folk-song.

The children in "On the Other Side of the Pacific"³⁶ are well versed by their female relatives in the superior customs of home: "Chinese New Year here just means eating. There's not much to it. Grandma says that New Year's in Taiwan is really something! People start preparations three days before New Year's Day. There are sacrifices to be made to the Heavenly God, the Earth God, and the Kitchen God. Besides that, there are so many other ceremonies! . . . The women go to the temples and burn incense. Married daughters go home to visit." (92) The boys' mother is keen to prepare traditional Chinese food for them at Chinese New Year. Her mother-in-law "hardly ate anything herself: she was too busy serving others the food. The more the guests ate, the happier she was." (146) Caring for

³⁴ Victor Hao Li, "From Qiao 橋 to Qiao 橋," in Tu Wei-ming ed., *The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of being Chinese today* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994), 220.

³⁵ See Nina Yuval-Davis and F. Anthias eds., *Woman-Nation-State* (London: Macmillan, 1989), 28.

³⁶ Chen Ruoxi, "Xiangzhe Taipingyang bi'an" 向著太平洋彼岸 (On the Other Side of the Pacific), translated in Kao ed., *Crossroads*, 79-152.

family is of primary importance to the narrator, who declares herself “not accustomed to . . . the general lack of affection in American families.”(83)

Caring for the family extends to the traditional role of serving the husband’s every domestic need: the protagonist of “Suyue’s New Year’s Eve”³⁷ cannot believe that her husband is capable of looking after himself without her: “he hadn’t washed a single dish since their wedding.” (158) She is critical of a Chinese woman who “made a show of complete devotion to her mother, but actually preferred to go to work each day and hire someone else to care for the old woman.” (160)

Arranged marriages are also occasionally sanctioned by narrators who are nostalgic for tradition. The narrator of *Breaking Out* cannot help but feel that until her bachelor Taiwanese independence activist friend marries “she ought to look after him more.” (131, 140) She is delighted when the man’s mother sends over, without warning, a girl from Taiwan to be his wife. She is aware of the contradictions of her position (feeling trapped and miserable in her own marriage of convenience), yet cannot help but hold out nostalgic hope: “She thought that . . . this sort of marriage has some considerable chance of success. Even if it seemed old fashioned and against the trend, it remedied some of the negative aspects of free love. If a man and woman get to know each other only after they marry, and cultivate their affection, they can only grow more and not less fond of each other, like eating a stick of sugarcane backwards, getting sweeter as you go along. Of course there was no love now, but Meiyue suddenly began to wonder whether love was that necessary.”(148)

Just as they live out their politics through their choices of partner, Chen’s protagonists are also eager to play a traditional role within the Confucian family, reinforcing the Chinese adage that a wife can be fulfilled through the success of her husband or son: (妻以夫為貴, 母以子為榮 *qi yi fu wei gui, mu yi zi wei rong*). Mrs Qi of “Inside Outside”³⁸ is easily flattered: “praise for [the library her husband worked in] was praise for her husband, and she quite readily basked in the glory.” (123) She is eager to entertain her husband’s important guests from China, a “born hostess,” thinking nothing of spending the whole afternoon preparing food for the delegation, “eager to be of help to everybody.” (114, 116)

³⁷ Chen Ruoxi, “Suyue de chuxi” 素月的除夕 (Suyue’s New Year’s Eve), *The Woman from Guizhou*, translated in Kao ed., *Crossroads*, 79-152.

³⁸ Chen Ruoxi, “Inside Outside,” *Inside Outside*, translated under the title “Another Fortress Besieged” in Chen Ruoxi, *The Old Man and Other Stories*.

4.2.2.3 Guardians of the culture, but only contingently Chinese

In a traditional patriarchal system, the family is defined along male lines and women are constructed as belonging to a family in the sense of being the property of that family. In marriage, the woman is transferred from her natal family into the family of the man she is marrying. This kinship structure, characterised by the exchange of women, is described by Levi-Strauss as universal.³⁹ In Christian marriage rituals it is symbolised by the giving away of the bride by her father. In Chinese, the verb for “marriage” is itself sexually differentiated, each version employing a transitive which renders explicit the movement of the woman within the family structure: women “marry out” or “marry to” somebody (*jiachuqu* 嫁出去, *jiageirenjia* 嫁給人家), whereas men “take in” [a wife] (*qujinlai* 娶進來).

Most of the characters in the fiction either reinforce or more passively subscribe to the sexist linguistic connotations of the language. For example, a compatriot expresses regret when he hears that the narrator of *Paper Marriage* has married an American: “I’m sorry, but I’m an unreconstructed proponent of greater China: I always express regret about [women] marrying out; though I’d offer congratulations for anyone [male] who was to marry in [ie, take a non-Chinese wife]!” (28-29)

Only very few female characters marry non-Chinese (Li Li’s “Jews of Kaifeng City,”⁴⁰ the protagonist of *Paper Marriage*, and a minor character in Chen Ruoxi’s *Foresight*). When they do, the fiction describes complex processes of deliberation and negotiation about what this means in terms of their Chinese identity: marrying out generally implies letting go of that identification with China. By contrast, there is a striking number of Chinese males in the fiction who have had previous marriages with American women. Almost all these women are portrayed negatively, and the Chinese men invariably move on to a Chinese wife or partner after that experience. However, their relationships with foreign women are never problematised in terms of what it means for the man’s identity. For males, their Chineseness is secure and integral; for females, Chineseness is contingent: it can be lost if they marry out.

The fifty-year old professor of Oriental history in Ouyang Zi’s “Autumn Leaves,”⁴¹ for example, has a mixed-race son by an American woman who has run off with another man. He adheres rigidly to Chinese customs and “stubbornly maintains the age-old sense of Oriental superiority.” Although he has spent the whole of his adult life in the United States,

³⁹ Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

⁴⁰ Li Li, “Kaifengcheng de youtairen” 開封城的猶太人 (The Jews of Kaifeng City), *Birds of Paradise Flowers*, 69-98.

he doesn't drink coffee or eat sandwiches; he changes into traditional Chinese dress when he comes home from work, and his house is decorated in traditional Chinese style. (204) He has brought his son up to understand very firmly that he is Chinese, and is emphatic that he should not marry an American. He assigns his new Taiwanese wife, the narrator, the responsibility of warning his son away from American girls.

The suitor of the protagonist of Chen Ruoxi's "The Crossroads"⁴² had previously been married to a white woman who had taken up with one of his students and then "cruelly kicked him out." (38) His house too is "the most Chinese-looking apartment [she] had ever seen in America," full of Chinese paintings, porcelains and enamels, oriental rugs and carved ivory objects. "It's marvellous! The place looks like a museum!" (40) The second of the three wives of the protagonist of *The Two Hus* was an American, Bessie, who was casual, careless and messy: "the only thing she ever concentrated on was going to bed." (21). Hu contrasts her with his third, Taiwanese, wife, who was always immaculate. (22) While he dubs his current simple bachelor existence in Chicago "Bessified," because of his lack of concern for décor and tidiness (a woman's job), there is no question of his having married an American affecting in any way his chauvinist Chinese identity. The protagonist of *Breaking Out* was married to an American woman, and then had an affair with a Jewish American woman which continued into the early years of his marriage to his current Taiwanese wife. He feels that his first marriage was "probably only a symptom of cultural curiosity," (51) and while he needed the physical comfort that his Jewish American friend could provide him, that was all it was: "if he was ever to marry again, it had to be a Chinese woman."

It is primarily female characters in the fiction who are assigned the burden of responsibility for the preservation of the integrity of the Chinese gene-pool. It is they who bear the children and who are the primary carers of the family, and this is generally presented as more important than personal, individual, happiness or fulfilment. The protagonist of *Foresight* does not like her Singapore Chinese employer, and she is aware that his wife, who has borne him four children, is unhappy and mentally unstable. However, she "doesn't oppose, and maybe even quite supports" his eugenic proposal that Chinese Americans, "capable people," should reproduce more to increase the Chinese proportion of the ethnic minority vote in California. In the eyes of the sympathetic protagonist, the Chinese race is more important than the happiness of the women responsible for propagating that race. However, the text of the novel itself is open to contradictory readings, which

⁴¹ Ouyang Zi, "Qiu ye" 秋葉 (Autumn Leaves), *Autumn Leaves*.

allows a critical feminist reader to make connections between the racism and sexism of the chauvinist employer, and to find both equally repellent. (165-166)

It is women who express concern about “losing” their children through marriage to non-Chinese. “Raising daughters in America is a thankless task!” according to a Chinese friend of the narrator of “On the Other Side of the Pacific,”⁴³ who is trying to “guard [her youngest daughter] from being snatched away by someone who isn’t Chinese.” The family’s eldest daughter had married an American and moved to the East Coast and they never saw her anymore: “That was why they all tried very hard to fix [the younger daughter] up with Chinese men. In the beginning, they limited their search to young Taiwanese men [but then] were forced to break the geographic barrier and asked only that the young man be from a cultural background similar to theirs [ie. to include overseas Chinese with just a little language ability].” (90) The narrator worries about her own sons: “If they continued to live in America, how could there be any guarantee that the next generation would not marry someone of another race?” (91)

Female worries about sons marrying American wives would seem to contradict the premise that male Chinese identity is secure regardless. However, when the context of the patriarchal family structure is considered, the logic behind these fears becomes easier to understand: it is mothers-in-law who are assigned the role of socialising daughters-in-law into the family. Mothers of Chinese sons may therefore be afraid less of “losing” their sons and more of the difficulty of the undertaking to integrate a Western woman into a Chinese family, which, as a number of Chen’s other stories reveal, involves the subordination of that woman within the hierarchical family system.

4.3 Negotiating the patriarchal system

Much has been written about the restriction and repression of women in traditional Chinese society. Confucianism is often held to account for many of these oppressive traditions, writers pointing to the prescriptive texts laid down in the Confucian Classics: the *Nü Jie* (Precepts for Women), the *Nü’er Jing* (The Classic for Girls) and the *Lienü Zhuan* (Biographies of Exemplary Women), which formed the basis of precepts such as “Three Obediences and Four Virtues” (三從四德 *sancongside*), emphasising chastity, obedience, devotion to duty and submission to the male. These critiques were first initiated by the Chinese writers of the New Culture and May Fourth Movements, who viewed the

⁴² Chen Ruoxi, “The Crossroads,” translated in Kao ed., *Crossroads*, 16-76.

⁴³ Chen Ruoxi, “Xiangzhe Taipingyang bi’an” 向著太平洋彼岸 (On the Other Side of the Pacific), translated in Kao ed., *Crossroads*.

emancipation of women as key to the modernisation of China at the turn of the century. More recent critical work on women's roles in traditional China has taken up a re-negotiation of the actual situation of women under a Confucian system, repudiating assumptions of universal victimization: Dorothy Ko argues that "the invention of an ahistorical 'Chinese tradition' that is feudal, patriarchal and oppressive was the result of a rare confluence of three divergent ideological and political traditions - the May Fourth New Culture movement, the Communist revolution, and Western feminist scholarship."⁴⁴

The patriarchal system is critiqued in a number of stories by the authors in this study, and power relations between the sexes are examined, particularly double standards surrounding infidelity. I would like to emphasise here my understanding that an oppressive patriarchal system is not a system perpetrated solely by men on women: women are just as often involved in reproducing and structuring patriarchal discourses as their male counterparts. Likewise, it is not only women who suffer under a patriarchal system: men too can find it restrictive and disabling.

4.3.1 Patriarchal oppression

In Chen's early depictions of rural Taiwan, we see a number of female characters who do not conform to traditional standards of Confucian morality, and who are not vilified for this. A small number of Chen's stories, however, do depict women as universally and systematically repressed. The narrator of one of her very first stories explicitly condemns the oppressive patriarchal tradition, concluding with the polemic: "Let the young get as far away as possible from that isolated and suffocating rural village and let the old people go on with their rotten old system - taking with them the evils it has spawned - and be buried in some forgotten corner of the earth."⁴⁵ One of Chen's most recent stories, "A Daughter's home,"⁴⁶ is likewise a comprehensive indictment of the treatment of women at the hands of Taiwanese men exercising their rights to exploit and mistreat their wives and daughters. The protagonist, Hui Xiang, had been forced to sacrifice her own education to support her brothers through university, had raised her own family, and had then cared for her widowed and ailing father for twenty years. She is now effectively single: her two daughters live abroad and her husband has left her to live with his mistress. On her father's death, her brothers persuade her to relinquish any claim to his estate, arguing that according to

⁴⁴ See Susan Mann, *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997) and Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994) (here 3).

⁴⁵ Chen Ruoxi, "Hui yan hei mao" 恢眼黑貓 (Grey-Eyed Black Cat), in *Chen Ruoxi zixuan ji*, 58. Quoted and translated by Michael S. Duke in "Personae," 60.

tradition a married daughter is no longer part of her natal family. She then discovers that her husband, who has assumed that she would inherit, has stopped paying the mortgage on the house she lives in. She is left penniless, facing homelessness.

Throughout the story the male characters quote tradition and custom in support of their treatment of Hui Xiang. Her husband justifies his treatment of her with the fact that she has not borne him a son: "They say that Taiwan has entered the stage of freedom and democracy, but the people here still stubbornly hold to the concept of the paternal line." (147) Hui Xiang had always believed that her father had her best interests at heart, but she had in fact been grievously exploited by him: he had refused to allow anyone else to care for him after his stroke (145); he had prevented her from divorcing her husband, quoting the Classics: "'all is well when there is peace within the family:' 'peace' is the responsibility of women to maintain – this is where women's greatness lies;" and yet he had been frank that he believed that "Once you married, you became an outsider to the family. It is your brothers who will carry on the family line; it's not that we don't love our daughter, it's just our Taiwanese custom." (149) He had made no provision for her in a will. "She slowly began to understand why it was that her daughters had gone abroad and didn't want to come back. . . . Taiwan, in the end, just wasn't a place for women." Her story ends with a plaintive appeal to her father's spirit: "She lit the incense sticks to pray. 'Ah Ba, twenty years have been like a day, I've offered you incense every single day. I wish you'd tell me, in what way does your daughter seem like an outsider to you? Just where is a daughter's home?'" (160)

Many of Chen's stories make reference to the law in Taiwan failing to uphold women's rights, particularly in divorce, as a father would always gain custody of children. The protagonist of "A Daughter's home" investigates the law when she discovers that her husband has a second family with two school-age children. She is surprised to find that the law permits extra-marital cohabitation: "No wonder her husband had enjoyed his right to take a concubine." (150) In *Foresight* the Taiwanese friend of the narrator declares that she is hopelessly naïve to imagine that because the wife is the wronged party she will be protected by the law in Taiwan in the event of a divorce. She cites a case in which a judge refused a woman a divorce because she had been only "lightly" battered by her husband. While protesting society's sexism, neither she (nor the implied author) seem to feel any compunction about expressing that protest in racist terms: "You obviously don't understand the marriage law here . . . we're still in the African jungle as far as that is concerned!" (356-357)

⁴⁶ Chen Ruoxi, "Nü'er de jia" 女兒的家 [A Daughter's home] *A Daughter's Home*, 141-160.

4.3.2 Internalisation of hierarchical extremes

The psychological aberrations of many of Ouyang Zi's characters can be read as depictions of the internalisation of an extreme version of some of the social values of a patriarchal Confucian tradition. The protagonist of "The Net,"⁴⁷ for example, "had given herself up to [her husband], offering him everything - her body, her mind, her will. . . . [She] found contentment in her surrender, and drew immense gratification from the realization that she had lost herself for the sake of someone she loved." (42) Yet this submission is not wholly "abnormal" in the Chinese tradition: it is on a continuum with appropriate wifely subordination to her husband. The protagonist's husband, the "normal" partner, does not find his wife's behaviour unusual or disturbing: "[He] had never hesitated to accept these offerings, taking them as though they were his inborn right (權利 *quanli*)."(42) Different versions of the story make it clear that the author was consciously negotiating issues of power within a marital relationship. In the earliest version,⁴⁸ the wife is disturbed that her husband has opened and responded to a private letter addressed to her, but she does not question his right to make decisions on her behalf: "That reply should have come from her, and not from [him]. The two were very different things!" (79) In the later version, Ouyang Zi changes this sentence to include the term "rights" for the women too: "But that reply should have come from her. What right (權利 *quanli*) did [he] have to decide on her behalf?" In the early version a power struggle is explicit: the husband "knew that he was in control, that he would be victorious in the end, but he certainly never expected her to capitulate in this bizarre manner" (65) After her capitulation: "How could I forsake you, you're the prettiest doll" (65) becomes, in the later version: "How could I forsake you, you silly child. Who would forsake such a docile *good wife*?" (50) (my italics).

Although they shocked and alienated some of her readers, a good number of Ouyang Zi's taboo scenarios can be seen as depicting merely the inappropriate application of ordinarily familiar and acceptable behaviour under the Confucian code: situations in which women slip into traditional "wifely" roles with men who are not socially sanctioned partners. The "perfect mother" of "Women Possessed", for example, who has offered herself completely to her lover: "Then he'd have me as his servant, his slave, to wait on him as if he were a king." (13) Her daughter, the narrator, had previously admired her mother's distant, sad look, "as if [she] had forgotten everything, even her own existence." Self-abnegation within the woman's passionless Confucian marriage was part of her perfection: she was "the

⁴⁷ Ouyang Zi, "Wang" 網 (The Net), *Autumn Leaves*, 39-52.

incarnation of all virtues,” who had never once quarrelled with her husband. It is only when directed outside of that marriage that her behaviour is interpreted as abnormal and perverse. The protagonist of “Autumn Leaves” slips without volition into a wifely role in relation to her new step-son. She finds pleasure and meaning in taking care of him: cooking, cleaning, changing his sheets. Initially she feels like a “loving elder sister, a happy companion.” She soon slips into the role of a “docile and obedient younger sister” (百依百順 *baiyibaishun*), which then leads on to a romantic relationship. This pattern could be seen as one that would be expected of a girl who has been socialized into the virtues of a good Confucian woman: it is exactly this response that she would follow in a traditional arranged marriage, and is indeed the pattern that has operated in her marriage of convenience with her new husband.

Ouyang Zi’s male protagonists in “The Vase”⁴⁹ and “Prodigal Father”⁵⁰ can be read as displaying a perversely exaggerated sense of the necessity of male dominance within marriage: “[He] couldn’t forgive her for lacerating his masculine self-respect. Again and again he sought opportunities to teach her a good lesson, to get her to back down into a woman’s proper place.” (54) They only feel like real men when their wives’ personalities are somehow muted: only “in sleep [did] her face lose its usual expression of slight contempt. . . only at this moment did she truly belong to him, him alone. In an instant his feeling of masculinity returned.” (56) In “Prodigal Father”, it is only as his wife lies prostrate, crushed by the departure of her son, that her husband feels again the “sweetness and desire of their honeymoon night.” The fact that her face is buried in the pillow is significant: he feels much more comfortable when he can avoid her “dizzying eyes, so full of life.” (118)

The wives too are shown to expect a certain level of assertiveness or dominance from their husbands. The wife of “Prodigal Father” tells her husband she has long waited for his help and support (120), and that of “The Vase” says: “What are you afraid of? I’m your wife, you have certain rights over me. Come on, fight for your rights! . . . Have I ever refused you? If you’re bothered that we don’t make love enough, it’s your own doing.” (61). Both husbands and wives accept a hierarchical norm. It is the husbands’ failure to live up to these norms that leads to their crises: this time it is men who are psychologically crippled by a distorted internalisation of patriarchal norms, which they feel they are failing to live up to.

Many critics of Ouyang Zi’s work avoid feminist interpretations. Chi Pang-yuan’s indication that “[h]er heroines are a far cry from the image of Chinese women who were tied

⁴⁸ Ouyang Zi, “Wang” 網 (The Net), *Modern Literature* Vol. 6 (January 1961), 75-81.

⁴⁹ “Huaping” 花瓶 (The Vase), *Autumn Leaves* 53-66.

⁵⁰ “Lang zi” 浪子 (Prodigal Father), *Autumn Leaves* 105-120.

down by traditional loyalties and virtues"⁵¹ gives the impression that the psychological problems experienced by female characters are not attributable to conventional patriarchal structures. My reading of "The Vase" and "Prodigal Father" sees these two stories as the most clearly illustrative of Ouyang Zi's investigations of the power relations between men and women and the damage that internalisation of hierarchical patriarchal norms can inflict on both men and women. No critic has analysed these stories in terms of what they might reveal about the patriarchal system. On the contrary, Yvonne Chang argues against a feminist reading of "The Vase" on the curious grounds that a woman in another story is depicted just as negatively as the man in this one: "While one could regard [aspects of] 'Vase' as a feminist protest . . . that is clearly not the conscious intention of the author. . . 'The Bewitched Woman' ['Woman Possessed'], for example, portrays a woman . . . capable of ignoble behaviour equal to that of the man in 'Vase'."⁵² Feminist protest would be a very limited genre indeed if it was restricted to negative portrayals of men and positive portrayals of women.

Other readings demonstrate what I would read as evidence of the unfamiliarity of contemporary critics with the device of the unreliable narrator. William Tay, one of Ouyang Zi's contemporaries, sees the theme of "Prodigal Father" as the mother-son relationship, in which "this dominating mother is finally defeated by her son with the sly help of his father."⁵³ Tay identifies with the male protagonist and describes the wife as seen through his eyes: a woman who denigrates her husband and dominates her son. He reads the dénouement as final punishment of the wife by her husband rather than the tragic collapse of the male protagonist's world. The fact that Ouyang Zi herself provided the English title "Prodigal Father"⁵⁴ for her translation of the story, while William Tay translates it "Prodigal Son" would support my contention that it is the psychology of the father that is the main focus of the story. Set alongside all the other unreliable narrators of Ouyang Zi's fiction, it seems strange that William Tay should choose not to see the psychological flaws apparent in this character.

Both "The Vase" and "Prodigal Father" were substantially revised in 1970,⁵⁵ perhaps with the intention of reducing the number of readers who might misread the stories

⁵¹ Chi Pang-yuan, et al. eds., *An Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Literature Vol II* (Taipei: National Institute for Compilation and Translation, 1975), 343.

⁵² Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang in Carver Chang eds. *Bamboo Shoots*, xxi.

⁵³ William Shu-sam Tay, "Images of Women: Notes on Ou-yang Tzu, Ts'ung Su and Shih Shu-ching", in Wai-lim Yip and William Tay eds. *Chinese Women Writers Today* (University of Maryland: Occasional Papers/Reprints Series in Contemporary Asian Studies No. 4, 1979), 84, 86.

⁵⁴ *The Chinese Pen* (Autumn, 1974), 50-64.

⁵⁵ Ouyang Zi, "Qiu ye" 秋葉 (Autumn Leaves), *Autumn Leaves* 65, 120.

in the way that William Tay has done. Comparisons between the earliest and latest versions reveal primarily changes which increase the 'unreliability' of the male narrators, deleting or reducing the evidence provided by the husbands which corroborate their accounts of disdain or a lack of love on the wives' part. For example, in the first version of "The Vase" his wife tells him in their final *dénouement* that she had only loved him once, at the moment when he was about to strangle her. This is cut from the later version. (*The girl with long hair* 79, *Autumn Leaves* 63.) In the early version of "Prodigal Father" Hongming doubts that he and his wife had ever genuinely loved each other on an equal footing; in the later version he is clear that they had been in love, though so long ago he can hardly remember the feeling. (*The girl with long hair* 134, *Autumn Leaves* 108). The warped psychology of the male protagonists is thus further emphasised in the revised versions, undermining readings which might interpret the husbands' perceptions as accurate.

Sally Lindfors reads "The Vase" as an "allegory about obsessive attachment to beauty, the kind of attachment that desires even the death of the loved one so that one can forever possess without fear of change or desertion."⁵⁶ (133) While she briefly discusses the feminist implications of "The Net" (21-22) and the relationship of sexual desire to self-definition in the case of the two husbands in "Vase" and "Prodigal Father" (125), she does not generally read Ouyang Zi's work as open to sociological interpretation, concluding that "both personal desire and the sense of social identity are shown to be *private psychological entities* in the fictional world Ouyang Tzu has created." She concedes that the protagonists "have internalized *real and existing social values*," (232) [my italics], later identified more explicitly: "The Confucian mold is a given social and psychological reality.... [Ouyang Zi's characters] cannot be happy, fulfilled or reconciled to who they are unless they fit, and fit genuinely, into that mold." (247) Lindfors does, not, however, go on to investigate the parameters of that "Confucian mold".

Parallels between these Modernist stories of Ouyang Zi (the "Modernist" label putting critics off from a sociological interpretation) and the more quotidian stories of Chen Ruoxi serve as further support for a feminist interpretation. The male protagonist of one of Chen Ruoxi's earliest stories, "Burning night,"⁵⁷ describes the same sense of anger and impotence as that felt by Ouyang Zi's unbalanced males when his wife completely withdraws from him after discovering that he has had an affair: "Nothing can be worse than being looked down upon, especially being looked down upon by one's own wife! She made him feel he was weak, ridiculous, made him seem small, foolish." (143). He is angry partly

⁵⁶ Sally Ann Lindfors "Private Lives."

because he had expected to be forgiven after just a brief period of punishment: he is aware that society, too, would be less harsh on him than his wife. A female colleague, unaware of their situation, opines: "In fact, women [whose husbands' have strayed] can't put all the blame on the man's shoulders, where would a man get wicked ideas from if his wife was good and proper? I have never had any sympathy for that sort of . . . woman." (145-146).

Chen Ruoxi also explores the problem of women finding themselves become passive in relation to men. It is most vividly described in an early story, "My Friend Aifen." In the presence of her boyfriend "Ai Fen's maturity, like the slices of mutton cooking in the boiling broth, shrivelled up into a tiny ball and was gobbled up without the least resistance." (110) The first person narrator of "The Crossroads" feels strong in the company of her suitor, but without him she experiences "surrealistic feelings of anxiety and displacement." (38) The protagonist of "Performance" feels like "Cinderella at the ball" when asked out by her American boss, light and floating, but is annoyed at herself for her excessive eagerness, and the transparency of her response: he knows she will accept and makes assumptions on that basis, making her feel as if she is less than autonomous. (58)

4.3.3 Unfaithful husbands

Chen Ruoxi's major concern about the rights of Chinese women in relation to the traditional patriarchal system is the double standard in spousal infidelity. A number of her stories depict male characters attempting to justify infidelity as a Chinese male's prerogative. Their discourse does not simply idealise the Chinese past, when polygamy was a legal norm: Chen's male characters seize on the new opportunities for and justifications of infidelity or bigamy that are presented by the geopolitical dislocation that is an aspect of Chinese modernity.

From the 1980s on, the opportunities for citizens of Hong Kong and Taiwan to do business in the PRC have increased. Many men spend significant periods of time over the border, managing factories or other enterprises. The political circumstances make it unlikely that their wives or families will visit the PRC very often; the men thus find it possible to have affairs or to establish second homes on the mainland with very little danger of their wives finding out. The political uncertainty regarding the status of Hong Kong and Taiwan also leads to a more radical physical separation of family members: many couples decide to seek an overseas education for their children, which will eventually entitle the family to residency rights in the West, as security in the event of political upheavals at home. In these

⁵⁷ Chen Ruoxi, "Ranshao de ye" 燃烧的夜晚 (Burning night), in *Chen Ruoxi zixuan ji*, 139-150.

situations, the wife will often accompany the children abroad, while the husband continues to live and work in Taiwan or Hong Kong, visiting his family as time and finances dictate. This flying back and forward is known colloquially as the “astronaut” (太空 *taikong*) syndrome. Male infidelity in these situations is so common that even the relatively young children of the Taiwanese protagonist in “Suyue’s New Year’s Eve”⁵⁸ know the joke: “Taiwan independence” (台獨 *Taidu*) no longer stands for “Taiwan independence activist,” but for “alone in Taiwan,” and the implications for the man’s family, while not as life-threatening as the White Terror was for independence activists, are certainly family-threatening for the “astronaut” family in the United States.

Chen’s novel *Foresight* was her earliest depiction of the “astronaut” syndrome. The wife living in the United States feels doubly abused by the infidelity of her husband, as she has worked so hard and experienced such loneliness after moving abroad with their daughter. Her husband, however, who has set up a second family in Taiwan, is unapologetic, and implies that his affair was justified by the fact that she had not borne him a son.⁵⁹

The male narrator of “Restoration of the stately male” is informed by a lorry driver from Hong Kong that his marriage has improved enormously since he began his “one family two systems” arrangement (a pun on the “one country two systems” arrangement under which Hong Kong was returned to the mainland), because of the reduced sexual demands he makes on his wife. He justifies his extramarital relationship in the PRC by contrasting his mistress’ devotion to him with the relative neglect of his wife, who works and therefore delegates her traditional wifely duties (cleaning, cooking etc.) to their Filipino maid. The lorry driver maintains that “The passing of the one-husband one-wife law in Hong Kong in the 1970s was the destruction of the traditional right of the Chinese male to take a concubine. Who would have thought that the establishment of the special economic zone in Shenzhen would be an opportunity to restore the rights of the stately males of Hong Kong!”(33)

The Hong Kong husband of “A husband’s space of his own” maintains that his recently-discovered affairs with the domestic servants do not mean anything: “the family is still my priority,” (131) and has the gall to appeal to his wife’s sense of family duty and loyalty: “As long as we both prioritize family above everything, it doesn’t matter if we live apart for a few years.”(137) He has no answer to his wife’s rhetorical question about what

⁵⁸ Chen Ruoxi, “Suyue de chuxi” 素月的除夕 (Suyue’s New Year’s Eve), *The Woman from Guizhou*, 81-102.

⁵⁹ An excellent critique of the novel is made in Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, “‘Astronaut Wives’ and ‘Little Dragons’: Identity Negotiations by Diasporic Chinese Women in Two Popular Novels of the 1980s,” in Wang Ling-chi and Wang Gungwu eds., *The Chinese Diaspora: Selected Essays Volume 1* (Times Academic Press: Singapore, 1998), 134-135.

he would do if she too embarked on a new relationship in Canada. The above two stories introduce a new perspective on the astronaut syndrome: Chinese men, keeping mistresses who are often young women from the (relatively poor) mainland, or domestic servants, are shown to be effectively reinstating a system of concubinage.

4.3.4 The female response

Chen Ruoxi sets up a range of possible responses to the scenarios of a husband's selfishness, abuse or infidelity. Her intentions with regard to her female readership in her later collections are explicitly motivational: in her Forward to *The Sorrows of Wang Zuo* she reports that one of her stories was based on a real situation and that she had been proud to hear that her account had inspired the young woman concerned to end an affair, leave the United States and go back to Taiwan to look for work. (6) In the Foreword to *A Daughter's Home*, Chen laments the lack of equality in Chinese society and states that this collection is an attempt to inspire thought on women's issues: "Consciousness-raising can't come about overnight, it needs self-exploration, social education, and most especially, the helping hand of one's peers." (1) Yet while her stories certainly raise the reader's consciousness of the injustices perpetrated by men on their wives, the denouements are often disappointing for a feminist reader.

The protagonist of "You have to leave in order to stay"⁶⁰ is initially outraged by her husband's suggestion that she should spend yet more years alone in the United States in order to secure residency rights: "All you can see is the green card! Why don't we just get divorced and I'll take responsibility for introducing you to a green-card holder, or no, even better, a woman with citizenship, how about that, hey? That way, you won't only be sure of getting your green card, you'll even be able to move to America to live! . . . Whatever you'd like: a white one, a black one, or a yellow-faced white-hearted banana, whichever you choose, I'll be your matchmaker." (97) By the end of the story, however, she submits to what she describes as her husband's better judgement of the post-1997 Hong Kong situation, telling herself that she is not simply playing the "good wife": she claims she is adopting the same strategy that Hong Kong has adapted towards its return to the mainland: a "retreat to attack" (以退為進 *yituiweijin*). (103)

A similar strategy of passive, self-abnegating tactics, that the narrators, and indeed the narratives, present as a "victory" over unfaithful husbands, is practised by wives who have fallen victim to the "astronaut" phenomenon. In "Restoration of the stately male" the

wife pre-empts her husband setting up a second home and transferring his loyalties to his mistress in Shenzhen by reverting to the Confucian model of a good wife: she sacks the Filipino maid, puts on an apron and for the first time in years prepares her husband's evening meal herself. She announces that she will travel back and forth with him instead of moving permanently to Australia, as had been planned. (34-35). The wife in "Play dumb" sells up in the United States and moves back to Taiwan, where she can guard against her husband setting up home with his mistress. In order to placate her husband, however, she takes the advice of the narrator to retract her accusations of an affair and pretend abject apologies for the "rash" decision she has made. The narrator congratulates her: "You really are a clever woman!" "That you and your husband are reconciled is more important than anything else, there's no need to worry about 'the other woman' now." (72)

The Hong Kong narrator of "The other woman" tries a direct appeal to the conscience of "the other woman" from the mainland and secretly offers her money to study abroad in order to get her out of the way. Her mother's advice had been to ignore the situation: "It's in men's nature to stray, to like to play the field . . . by middle age they know what's good for them, and in the end it is always the wife and children who come first," (38) but the narrator is regretful that she had not taken action earlier. Nonetheless, she holds onto her mother's advice that "you just have to remember your position and there's no need to be afraid of anything." (49) She cooks nice meals and dresses up for her husband, telling herself that if the "other woman" is the third party to this relationship, then she is surely the "first" party. If the roles are reversed and her husband does leave her for the mistress, she decides that she won't let him go even then, but will play the third party to their relationship.

For these protagonists, preservation of their marriage is their only goal. Saving their marriage is interpreted as a victory in spite of the fact that their tactics involve reversion to a submissive, subservient role. While the stories start out by seeming to invite women to consider how they might empower themselves within relationships where they have been treated badly, they conclude, in the eyes of a feminist reader, with humiliating self-deception: there is no reason to believe that these tactics will in fact end their husband's affairs. The illusion of self-determination is rendered doubly insidious by the approval and support of female friends and relatives in the characters' decisions to embrace self-subordination. The lack of any ironic comment or other authorial distancing effect means the stories are almost certain to function, for many readers, as an endorsement of the protagonists' decision.

⁶⁰ Chen Ruoxi "Weile liuxia, ni yao xian zou" 爲了留下，你要先走 [You have to leave in order to stay].

In fiction by Chen Ruoxi and Li Li, female characters who live in the United States are conscious of themselves as a younger, modern generation of Chinese women, who have assumed that they are no longer subject to the same constraints as their mothers. The displacement of the wife, the 內人 *neiren* (literally “the person indoors”) to America, as indicated by the colloquial expression 內在美 *neizaimei*, represents a radical reversal of the usual social arrangements in a patriarchal system, which tends to assign the public domain to the male, and the home and the domestic to the female.⁶¹ While the experience does imbue a number of Chen’s characters with a sense of independence and autonomy that leads to the questioning of patriarchal values, most, however, still remain faithful to their husbands in spite of their husbands’ failure to do the same. They are active participants, in spite of their protestations against the double standard, in the discourse which allows that double standard to exist, through their pride in asserting their own superior morality, and their determination not to allow their husbands’ behaviour to jeopardise their marriages. When faced with their husbands’ infidelities and the potential breakdown of their own marriages, they find unexpected empathy with the old-fashioned values of their mothers’ generation. None of the stories depict the process of a woman ending a marriage of her own volition. Protagonists may agree to a divorce, where an irrevocable breakdown has occurred, but they never initiate that decision. Once a divorce is inevitable, or has already occurred, they generally move towards acceptance and forgiveness alongside a new sense of independence.

The wife in Li Li’s “Two Cities”⁶² is aware, when she discovers her husband’s affair, that: “If she was a woman of her grandmother’s generation, most would have just accepted it, as long as the other woman didn’t show her face at the main door of the house – or even if she did come in, some sort of accommodation could be made. As for her mother’s generation, there were at least powerful social and moral pressures that would give the wronged woman some degree of compensatory spiritual comfort and self-respect. But when it came to her generation, what was there? Who would make denouncements, or even offer sympathy? . . . Most Americans . . . at least had some legal protection, and would usually divorce in this sort of situation.” (48) She wonders if she is not operating a double standard herself, since she hasn’t condemned her friend who is having an affair with a married man. (49) She decides to save her marriage by appealing indirectly to her husband: “This family needs you,” and directly to the mistress, who agrees to let her husband go.

Wangzuo, 95-104.

⁶¹ This theme is taken up in detail in Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, “‘Astronaut Wives’ and ‘Little Dragons,’” 133-151.

⁶² Li Li, “Shuang cheng” 雙城 (Two cities), *The Floating World*, 1-86.

The protagonist of “Ah-lan’s decision” has played the strategy of the woman described above in “The other woman” for over six months: she has refused to consent to a divorce in spite of the fact that her husband is living with another woman. Finally giving up that resistance is presented as a release: “Stop worrying, get over it!” The message is that “If a man wants to go, there’s no keeping him. Get over it, and you too will be able to live happily, and you’ll be free and independent.”(144)

The protagonist of *Foresight* decides to return to the United States after discovering that her husband has a mistress and child in Taiwan, but she will not take action herself: “Divorce, the green cards . . . these things are [his] business. My business is to return to California. Once I’ve sorted my own self out, then I can worry about him. . . . Now that this is over, I should be grateful to [him]. He has opened my eyes. I can’t rely on other people, I ought always to be independent.” (363) At the same time, however, she decides to commit her final few days in Taiwan to an attempt to reconcile her Taiwanese friend with her husband, who has made his secretary pregnant and is planning to marry her. The implication is that she too might not necessarily see this juncture as the final end to her own marriage: it is just that she has decided to let go and leave these matters in her husband’s hands. (Her husband has indicated that he will in fact not want a divorce, most probably because the green card is still important to him.) (344-345)

The US-based protagonist of “Roses and calamus”⁶³ is already divorced as a result of her husband’s affairs. “With regard to love and marriage, there was a generation gap between mother and daughter. It became particularly difficult for [the daughter] to bridge after her mother had [discovered her own husband’s long term affair.] She could forgive the older generations’ arranged marriages, but she had really turned her nose up at the idea of reconciliation after betrayal. . . . The older generation stressed forbearance and conciliation, but they didn’t have any choice. She had always considered herself a new woman with no need to be forced to make compromises.” (65-66) Yet when her mother extends an invitation to her husband’s mistress to visit him on his deathbed, the narrator begins to feel a change of heart. She suspects that she “might not understand the true nature of love.” “What particularly lingered in her heart was her mother’s peaceful tolerance, her air of one who simply embraced the whole world. She wished she could cultivate that sort of good fortune.”(67)

⁶³ Chen Ruoxi “Meigui he changpu” 玫瑰和菖蒲 (Roses and calamus), *Wang Zuo*, 63-70.

The US-based protagonist of “Yuantong temple” 圓通寺⁶⁴ is surprised by the submissive acceptance of her cousin in Taiwan of an abusive, unfaithful husband: “I started to suspect that the generation gap might not be only to do with age.... How could my cousin have stayed behind in my mother’s generation despite Taiwan’s rapid social explosion, its material and cultural growth?” (22-23) She asks her cousin if she has heard of Lu Hsiu-lien or New Feminism, but is answered with playful disregard: “You know that I only graduated from primary school ... what are you doing testing me on whatever ‘isms’!” The narrator denies ‘testing’ her, declaring that “I wanted to know how it was that you seem so - happy?” Her cousin’s response is lengthy: she says that she steps back from everything, that her desires are simple, she has some good memories, and that she is tremendously busy, still worrying about her children. She is grateful for the little spare time that she has: she takes part in church activities, and believes in all the religions that are available to her. Nowadays, she maintains, with a bashful, almost guilty, smile: “My burdens seem to be getting lighter day by day, and I too am feeling happier as each day goes by.... perhaps it’s just that I’m incredibly simple?” (23, 25-26)

Chen writes in her introduction to *A Daughter’s Home* that “It is clear that a woman really only has herself to rely on. Her own raised consciousness and determination, her own tolerance, love and patience. Most especially, her own ability to provide for herself.”⁶⁵ Those who are separated or divorced do find a determination to be independent, once they are obliged to fend for themselves, but as many women apply their “determination” to saving their marriages as to letting go, seeming to resign themselves to the fact that “In the end times might change, but men are still never faithful in marriage.”⁶⁶

Chen’s depictions of single women who decide that a sense of wholeness and belonging cannot be found through reliance on men, indeed that it is often impeded by men, reveals that gender concerns are forcing a reconsideration of the validity of some aspects of Chinese culture, particularly the relations between the sexes and the position of the wife in the family structure. Yet her negotiations on this point are tentative. Conciliatory messages about traditional virtues often come from narrators who are free of the attachments they cling to: they are already divorced, or their partners are either dead, or far away.⁶⁷ While female narrators expose the dilemmas of a woman’s situation in seeking to satisfy themselves as well as fulfil traditional expectations, the plots are often resolved with indications that harmony will be wrought through compromise. Confucian feminine virtues

⁶⁴ Chen Ruoxi “Yuantong shi” 圓通寺 (Yuantong temple), *Wang Zuo*, 17-26

⁶⁵ Chen Ruoxi, Introduction to *A Daughter’s Home*, no page refs.

⁶⁶ Chen Ruoxi “Meigui he changpu” 玫瑰和菖蒲 (Roses and calamus), *Wang Zuo*, 68.

continue to be upheld, and the responses to male infidelity are ultimately conciliatory. A number of Chen's characters adopt non-action and unconditional acceptance of fate: a traditional Buddhist and Taoist stance, as well as a Confucian trait of passive submission.

The sexism of different standards for acceptable male and female behaviour is prevalent in all patriarchal societies, but is often exacerbated by localist or anti-modern discourses on identity. Critic Rey Chow explicitly equates some aspects of discourses on Chinese identity with sexism: "It is sexism . . . which constitutes the core of cultural authenticity, loyalty and patriotism. . . . Such sexism makes women the visible bearers of cultural and sexual boundaries, bearers whose transgressions *matter*, while the equivalent transgressions of men continue to be *overlooked*."⁶⁸ By making male transgressions the subject of their fiction, Chen Ruoxi and Li Li are not overlooking those transgressions; but their female characters do often forgive those transgressions. Rather than challenging or seeking to disrupt the gender bias of assigning certain mores to the female sex, the authors present female characters who gladly assume the role of bearers of traditional cultural and sexual mores. They are never transgressive themselves; their protests about male behaviour thus tend to highlight and lament, rather than to challenge, the existing patriarchal system.

⁶⁸ Rey Chow, "Seminal Dispersal, Fecal Retention, and Related Narrative Matters: Eileen Chang's Tale of Roses in the Problematic of Modern Writing", *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 11.2 (1999).

5. Nation

Nation-ness, according to Benedict Anderson, is “the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our times.”¹ Untheorised conceptions of national identity tend to assume that it is a natural and universal: that though it might often lie dormant, a communal spirit can be quickly roused in a population through events such as revolution, economic crisis or war. The modernist, constructionist view sees nationalism as a by-product of the wider modernisation process associated with the rise of industrial capitalism. Anderson proposes that nationality and nationalism are “cultural artefacts” that were created at the end of the eighteenth century. Communities are distinguished by the style in which they are imagined by their members, and this is rooted in culture: “nationalism has to be understood by aligning it not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which - as well as against which - it came into being.”²

Race and ethnicity are the primary ideological constructs that are used to organise and divide people into different cultural and national communities. Racial divisions depend upon what are perceived as immutable biological or physiognomic differences, maintained by a notion of collective stock or inheritance. Like biological sex, race, for much of the last two centuries, was taken to mean discrete divisions of human kind with visible characteristics marking those divisions. This classification was combined with the idea that races, like the sexes, had characteristics of temperament, ability, and moral nature, which constituted a racial inheritance. Race was seen to be a “natural” grouping of human populations and the primary determinant of civilization. As in the case of sex and gender, this essentialising and reductive understanding of physical distinctiveness has been discredited, even as it still impacts upon the lives of individuals: “People who are designated as being of this or that ‘group’ on the basis of physical distinctiveness come to share a common experience: complex though it is, there is a social reality underlying what it means to be [designated as of a particular race].”³

Ethnicity involves belonging to a particular culturally-identified group. The dominant view of what characterises the group may change over time, but it is usually predicated on a common culture, religion, language or race. Ethnic divides depend in the main on a voluntaristic normative identification; belonging to the group involves partaking of the social conditions of a group. Identification is a process, and people’s identification

¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 3.

² *Ibid.*, 19.

³ Steve Fenton, *Ethnicity: Racism, Class and Culture* (Hampshire and London: MacMillan, 1999), 66-67.

can and does change both temporally and spatially. In different social and historical circumstances, the same groups might be constructed in different ways: “groups that have been called or have called themselves national at one point, or in one territory, have become ethnic or racial in other contexts (for example Jews have been referred to sequentially in this way in the Soviet Union, the USA and Nazi Germany).”⁴

National identities draw on conceptions of race and ethnicity, and can be historically, territorially, or culturally defined. Intellectuals and political elites are influential shapers of nationalist myths of common racial and ethnic foundations, but also myths of common destiny. Through promoting nationalist ideological movements, they create a perception of autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population that constitutes an actual or potential nation. Chinese conceptions of nation and collective identity as discussed below, have been constructed in different historical periods and in different locations by a range of discourses: cultural, racial, territorial, political, and ethnic.

Below, I look at the trope of “obsession with China” and the role of the Chinese intellectual and overseas Chinese in discourses of Chinese identity. I examine the work of each of the three writers in terms of their negotiations on Chinese identity, and the complicating historical and political circumstances of their identification with Taiwan. With the understanding that identities “are constructed through, not outside, difference,” and that “identities can function as points of identification and attachment only *because* of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render ‘outside’,”⁵ I look at the way in which non-Chinese are presented in the fiction.

5.1 Obsession with China

C T Hsia first coined the phrase “obsession with China” in his influential 1961 work, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, arguing that “[w]hat distinguishes this ‘modern’ phase of Chinese literature . . . is . . . its burden of moral contemplation: its obsessive concern with China as a nation afflicted with a spiritual disease and therefore unable to strengthen itself or change its set ways of inhumanity.”⁶ Fredric Jameson echoed

⁴ Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis, *Racialized Boundaries: Race, Nation, Gender, Colour and Class and the anti-racist struggle* (Routledge: London and New York, 1992), 4.

⁵ Stewart Hall, “Who needs identity?” in Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay eds., *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage, 1996), 5.

⁶ C T Hsia, Appendix 1, “Obsession with China: The Moral Burden of Modern Chinese Literature,” C T Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (Third edition with an introduction by David Der-wei Wang, Indiana University Press; Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1999), 533. Hsia argues that “every important Chinese writer is obsessed with China,” but that unlike Western modernists who identify the sick state of their countries with the state of man in the modern world, “the Chinese writer sees the conditions of China as peculiarly Chinese and not applicable elsewhere. . . [displaying] a certain patriotic provinciality and a naïveté of faith with regard to better conditions elsewhere.” (536). The thesis originally referred to pre-1949 literature, but a supplementary appendix

Hsia's argument in 1989, claiming that Chinese texts, like other Third World texts, are "always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society," in which "the individual story and the individual experience cannot but ultimately involve the whole laborious telling of the experience of the collectivity itself."⁷ Jameson's work is not uncontested: Aijaz Ahmad's critique exposes the reductive nature of his totalising narrative, and shows how this devalorises literary production the Third World.⁸ Gregory Lee points out Jameson's limited understanding of Chinese literature and the nature of Chinese socialism, but he too maintains that "politics is the history and context of contemporary Chinese poetry," and argues that even avowedly apolitical cultural producers are complicit in "the discourse of a totalising nationalism, a facet of the Chinese identity projected by both official and oppositional ideologies."⁹ Even as he celebrates the potential of the periphery, Leo Ou-fan Lee speaks of difficulty that he and other Chinese writers in the United States have in resisting the "obsession with China" syndrome, which has "so dominated the literary imaginations of modern Chinese everywhere...."¹⁰ Whether or not that "obsession" is explicit in literary texts, it has become axiomatic for readers, both Chinese and Western, to look for and to find allegories of nation in the fiction of Chinese writers.

The group of writers centred around the journal *Modern Literature* were taught by C T Hsia's brother, T A Hsia, at the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at National Taiwan University. Bai Xianrong, founder of the journal, makes explicit reference to C T Hsia's phrase in his own analysis of Taiwan literature, agreeing that "for our new writers . . . the individual fate is inevitably bound up with the national destiny of China." Bai draws distinctions between May Fourth literature on the mainland and the writing on Taiwan produced by émigré writers of the second generation: "To circumvent possible government censorship, these new writers . . . have avoided frontal attacks on burning social and political issues. Instead, they turn to the study of the individual psyche: their problem of identity in Taiwan; their cultural deprivation; their sense of insecurity; their claustrophobic fears on a small island and the bewilderment that comes with being used as hostages for the

by Hsia in the 1999 edition acknowledges the continuation of the "obsession with China" in post-1949 literature from Taiwan: "Obsession with China (II): Three Taiwan writers" (first published in 1975), 564.

⁷ Fredric Jameson, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (1986): 69, 86.

⁸ Aijaz Ahmed, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London and New York: Verso, 1992).

⁹ Gregory B Lee, "Contempt for the Contemporary: Orientalists, Western Marxists and Chinese Poetry" in Gregory B Lee, *Troubadours, Trumpeters, Troubled Makers: Lyricism, nationalism, and hybridity in China and its Others* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1996), 115, 117.

¹⁰ Leo Ou-fan Lee, "On the Margins of the Chinese Discourse: Some Personal Thoughts on the Cultural Meaning of the Periphery" in Tu Wei-ming ed. *The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of being Chinese today* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994), 221-238.

sins of their fathers. Turning inward is thus necessitated by circumstance as well as by a sense of intense self-consciousness.”¹¹

The bulk of the fictional work of Chen Ruoxi and Li Li explicitly depicts individuals whose fates are bound up with the political divisions of greater China. Most of Chen’s work, and some of Li Li’s, can be characterised as direct commentary on Chinese social and political issues, although the political, as discussed in the previous chapter, is almost always portrayed as intensely personal. It is only in the work of Ouyang Zi, where the main theme is that of the individual psyche, that allegories of nation must be actively constructed. I argue that such an allegorical reading is fruitful, but limit detailed analysis here to the two of Ouyang Zi’s stories which are explicitly associated with Chinese identity. Below, I will take up the notion of both “China as a nation afflicted with a spiritual disease” and the Chinese “burden of moral contemplation,” as it is taken up by overseas Chinese writers.

5.1.1 Psychological portraits of the Chinese “spiritual disease”

The acute crisis of confidence in Chinese identity which arose in the late nineteenth century following internal decline and the impact of confrontation with the modern West was key to the modernisers’ portrayals of China as spiritually diseased. Traditional feudal patriarchal culture was held responsible for much of China’s weakness. One of the most famous short stories of modern Chinese fiction, and the one which best exemplifies Hsia’s “spiritual disease,” is Lu Xun’s cutting psychological portrait of the Chinese everyman at the beginning of the twentieth century, “The True Story of Ah Q.” A more recent exposition of the “Ah-Q spirit” was presented in the early 1990s by a Taiwan intellectual, Bo Yang. In his rounded attack on the Chinese character, *The Ugly Chinaman*, he describes one aspect of this spirit as: “chronic inferiority on the one hand, and overbearing arrogance on the other. A Chinese with an inferiority complex is a slave; a Chinese with a superiority complex is a tyrant.”¹² Below, I look at the “psychological fiction” of Ouyang Zi and Chen Ruoxi, to explore their portraits of specifically Chinese identity crises and personality disorders.

Ouyang Zi’s psychological portraits portray characters with various neuroses. While probably not consciously intended as allegorical depictions of the nation, there are significant structural affinities between many of Ouyang Zi’s stories and the personal and historical circumstances of the author and her native place which would support an

¹¹ Pai Hsien-yung 白先勇 (Bai Xianyong), “The Wandering Chinese: The Theme of Exile in Taiwan Fiction.” *The Iowa Review* 7. 2-3 (Spring-Summer 1976): 205-212, esp. 207.

allegorical reading, along the lines undertaken by Anne Wedell-Wedellsborg, who concludes that: "the allegorical mode is indeed present in contemporary Chinese literature, even in writers who do not seem to use it consciously as the overall structuring framework of the text."¹³ Ouyang Zi had identified strongly with and had been happy in Japan, where she was born: she has described the shock and dislocation she felt on moving to Taiwan after retrocession, when she and her family had to learn to speak Mandarin (her parents had spoken only Taiwanese and Japanese), and she had learnt about the Sino-Japanese war and the Nanjing massacre: "It was as if I'd woken from a dream, with the feeling in my heart that I'd been betrayed by a loved one. At the same time I felt a sort of shame and inadequacy, as if my identification with "the enemy" as a child was the greatest act of disloyalty to my homeland".¹⁴

The despair of Ouyang Zi's characters who feel ashamed of their desires, who harbour a love for someone who is unattainable, who do not understand who they are or what their true identity is, who are suddenly shocked by the depravity of their own or another's motives, can all be translated into Ouyang Zi's personal history and Taiwan's contemporary situation in terms of a similar resonance, a similar search for identity: Japanese, Chinese, or Taiwanese? In Taiwan's history since 1895, loyalty to one inevitably meant betrayal of the others.

In Ouyang Zi's "Autumn Leaves,"¹⁵ and "The Test"¹⁶ the characters' psychological crises are linked explicitly to their Chinese identity. "The Test" exists in two versions. The original story, entitled "Dating," features a protagonist whose problems can be read as reflecting adolescent psychological conflicts regarding dating and relationships as much as the specifically cross-cultural context. For example, the protagonist states that she deliberately hides her feelings from boyfriends, and expects her date to guess how she feels in spite of the contradictory signals that she sends him. (2-3) In the later version of the story a number of these purely adolescent problems are removed: she openly tells Paul that she

¹² Bo Yang, *The Ugly Chinaman and the Crisis of Chinese Culture* (Translated and edited by Don J. Cohn and Jing Qing, St. Leonards, NSW, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1992).

¹³ Anne Wedell-Wedellsborg examines the debates and the application of Hsia and Jameson's texts on national allegory, alongside a detailed introduction to literary theories of allegory. Anne Wedell-Wedellsborg, "Self-identity and allegory in the fiction of Yu Hua" in Lisbeth Littrup ed. *Identity in Asian Literature* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996), 77.

¹⁴ Ouyang Zi, "Xiangtu. Xuetong. Gen" 鄉土·血統·根 (Native soil. Blood lines. Roots), in *Shengming de guiji* 生命的軌跡 (The track of life) (Taipei: Jiuge chubanshe, 1988), 163-4.

¹⁵ Ouyang Zi, "Qiu ye" 秋葉 (Autumn Leaves). *Autumn Leaves*, 201-230.

¹⁶ Ouyang Zi, "Kaoyan" 考驗 (The Test), *Autumn Leaves*, 89-104. First published as "Yue hui" 約會 (Dating), *Modern Literature* Vol. 21 (1964) 1-13.

had enjoyed their first date and that she is happy that he has invited her out again.(92-93)¹⁷ The change of title is thus indicative of the change of emphasis: in the later version, “dating” is not a problem in itself; the “test” is more specifically the cross-cultural aspect of the relationship:

Although Meilian felt within her very bones that she was Chinese, Oriental, and was deeply proud to be so, she had long believed that different cultures, through mutual understanding, could be connected and united as in marriage. The truth was, she had seen her friendship with Paul as a sort of symbol, a test, as if she could prove through going out with him, or even loving him, the possibility of that sort of marriage of cultures. She had always thought that the human spirit did not have a nationality. Oh, she so longed to transcend nationality, to be a “global citizen.” (102)

Meilian proves unable to transcend her national consciousness, which is a conflicted mixture of pride in her heritage and a deep sense of Chinese inferiority vis-a-vis the West. This status anxiety gives rise to a number of awkward situations in her relationship with her American classmate: Paul is enamoured of ancient Chinese history and culture; Meilian feels obliged to counter his enthusiasm with the contention that it was China’s glorification of the past that had led to its decline. (92). Paul wants to take Meilian to a Chinese restaurant for dinner, but she insists on American food, to signal her adaptation to the West. (95) In “Dating” a parenthesis explains that Meilian herself is unsure of her motivation for this insistence, but it is clarified by the succeeding incident: Paul tries to dissuade her from ordering coffee with her meal; Meilian replies that she is not doing this to impress him. (3) (The drinking of coffee, particularly black coffee, is a frequent indicator of sophistication and adaptation to the West in the fiction of this period.) Meilian subsequently becomes worried that she might appear unpatriotic: in an anxious aside she reassures herself that “Of course, Paul knew how much she loved her country.”(3)

Chapter 3 of this thesis examines the story in the context of Meilian’s self-Orientalising strategies. She attributes Paul’s failure to make physical contact with her to his exaggerated respect for cultural difference: “most probably, he was afraid of offending her.” (97, 92) In the early version of the story it is clear that Meilian would be happy to respond to a caress: she observes other couples kissing and holding hands and begins to imagine her own reaction if Paul were to put his arm around her. In Taiwan, she knows would have pushed the boy away, but with Paul she wants to be more encouraging (2,7)

¹⁷ In her study, Lindfors acknowledges that “The best way to understand the abstract and seemingly unintegrated scenes and sentiments in ‘The Test’ is to see them in terms of [Ouyang Zi’s] increasingly conscious exploration of identity,” but she does not explore the theme further. Lindfors “Private Lives”, 198.

However, in the later version she is resigned to the impossibility of Paul breaking through her reified Chinese reserve. She dwells instead on a critical observation of American girls:

The most surprising difference Meilian had come across since her arrival in America was the attitude of American girls to their boyfriends. They weren't at all reserved, had an extremely casual attitude, and even chased after boys themselves, as if they were afraid of remaining spinsters. She didn't understand why Paul preferred to go out with her. It would be so much easier for him to have fun with an American girl. (97-98)

This defeatist thinking sets up the dénouement of the story, when the couple bump into a group of Paul's friends. Although she and Paul had planned to see a film together, Meilian agrees to join the group to play cards. Neither she nor Paul wants to go with them, and Paul is clearly confused and upset by her inexplicable decision. She realises that she has again been trying to "test" him and that she in fact wanted him to override her decision:

To let his friends know that she - a Chinese person - was more important than them . . . That's right, that's right, she had wanted, primarily, to satisfy her own vanity, that was all! It was only because she was born a Chinese person, only because she came from a "backward country" that she thirsted after proof of her own importance in this way.

Was this the so-called "inferiority complex"? Could it be? Meilian didn't understand why, if a country was comparatively poor, comparatively weak, it should be regarded as "inferior". No! China might be poor, might be weak, but it certainly wasn't "inferior." (100-101)

In spite of the self-awareness she demonstrates with regard to her psychological complex, Meilian concludes that there is an unbridgeable gap between cultures:

. . . they had never made real contact, and were never fated to. It was as if they each stood on the opposite shores of a great river . . . the distance was too great, they couldn't make contact across it. Yes, distance - the distance created by different nationalities, races and cultures. (102-103)

Meilian's schizophrenic self-love/self-loathing and the explicit identification she makes between her own psychology and her national identity resonate strongly with the Chinese "spiritual disease" described by Lu Xun and Bo Yang. Her construction of Chinese "difference" is at once code for superiority over American girls and at the same time a heartfelt attempt to banish the notion of inferiority. She is ultimately unable to relate to Paul as an individual: she feels it is her national, racial and cultural identity that prevents a cross-cultural relationship.¹⁸

¹⁸ Perry Link has discussed the problematic of exactly this type of thinking in relation to Chinese intellectuals from the PRC in the late 1980s: Perry Link, *Evening Chats in Beijing: Probing China's Predicament* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1992), 293.

In “Autumn Leaves”¹⁹ the perceived incompatibility between Chinese and American cultures is presented within a single character: the schizophrenic identity of a half-American, half-Chinese young man, Minsheng. His father “stubbornly maintains the age-old sense of Oriental superiority”(204) and has brought his son up accordingly. To his new stepmother from Taiwan, Minsheng initially seems to possess the best of both worlds: the height and Western good looks he has inherited from his American mother, and the manners, modesty and reticence inculcated in him by his father’s strict Confucian upbringing. (203, 217) This attribution of a superior physique to the West and a superior culture to the East echoes the mentality of conservative Chinese reformers at the turn of the century, who called on their compatriots to preserve the essence of Chinese culture while selectively adopting Western technologies: “Chinese for the spiritual essence, Western learning for practical use.” The material superiority of the West: its military, industrial and economic dominance, and the operation of global power by Westerners, has led to a valorisation of the physical appearance of Westerners. In Taiwan of the 1980s and 1990s, Western faces, generally presented as American, were ubiquitous in advertising. Associations of physical superiority are complex constructions which result from local, national, and global relations, past and present, and which are constructed alongside class and gender distinctions. There are very few references to racially-determined looks in the fiction of the authors under discussion in this thesis. Where these do exist, as in the above example, the construction can generally be understood as “fundamentally asymmetrical, . . . ‘whiteness’ signal[ing] the production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than disadvantage.”²⁰

As for the moral superiority attributed to the Chinese, Minsheng initially challenges Yifen’s reproduction of the stereotyped dichotomy between Chinese and Westerners: he is gently mocking of her surprise that that he enjoyed spending time in the park as a child: “American children are generally so active . . . I would have thought very few of them would have the patience to enjoy scenery.” (219) When she expresses surprise that American students go to bars: “In Taiwan, only Americans and marines and that sort go to that type of place,” he jeers in response: “and that proves how much more cultured Orientals are than Westerners!” (216) Yet Minsheng reveals that he too recognises and has been shaped by these distinctions; indeed that he has never been able to reconcile the dichotomy inculcated in him by his father’s insistence on his Chinese “difference”:

¹⁹ “Qiu ye” 秋葉 (Autumn Leaves). *Autumn Leaves*, 201-230.

²⁰ Ruth Frankenberg, *The Social Construction of Whiteness: White Women, Race Matters* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 14.

I began a long period of struggle, exploring my identity. I asked myself: "Who am I? Who am I really? Am I in the end my father or my mother? Oriental or Western? Chinese or American? I know how to be obedient, diffident, and observe all the proprieties. But does this count as me? Is this my real nature? Am I really an ideal Chinese gentleman of few words and reticent behaviour? If so, why am I so unhappy, why do I feel so disconnected? What about the emotions in my heart desperate for release, and the surging thoughts desperate to be expressed?" Two opposing forces were battling it out in my chest; . . . I felt as if I was being torn apart, that I'd suffer eternally, and never find peace. (223)

Minsheng finally identifies his passionate, Western side as his true self, sobbing: "I understand, . . . I understand . . . in the end it's my mother, I am my mother's son." (228) It is not a liberating release: it has come in the context of a taboo and unfilial passion for his father's wife, and represents for him a rejection of his father, and of his Chinese identity.

Chinese identity in these two stories by Ouyang Zi is experienced as restrictive and parochial, rendering cross-cultural relationships impossible and limiting the possibility of self-fulfilment or self-expression. The characters are self-aware, but they are unable to break free of the internalised cultural pressures which rigidly define what their "Chineseness" means in terms of self-expression.

Chen Ruoxi's work features three profiles of Chinese characters who have no insight or self-awareness themselves. In each case, the reader is explicitly directed to look for a psycho-sociological meaning behind the stream-of-consciousness narrative of the speakers: the monologues are addressed to a psychology student, a priest and a legal psychologist respectively. The old woman of "Morning Encounter With a Stranger"²¹ gives a self-pitying account of the terrible disappointment her son has been to her because of his divorce. She reveals that in her search for a perfect daughter-in-law she had ruled out three American women he had loved, including one who had learned Chinese in order to adapt herself to her son's culture because "The Bu family has had only one son for each of the last several generations . . . a child of mixed race really wouldn't have been acceptable." When she had finally succeeded in arranging a hasty marriage to a much younger Chinese woman, "the daughter-in-law I chose myself," she had pressured this woman to have a child, precipitating a divorce. She ends her monologue with plaintive self-justification: "I only asked him to obey me in this one matter." (122)

The impotence of the narrator of "My nightmare"²² is linked directly to his sense of autonomy as an individual negotiating his identity as a Chinese or Canadian citizen. He has

²¹ Chen Ruoxi, "Yujian mosheng nüzi de natiang shangwu" 遇見陌生女子的那天上午 (Morning Encounter with a Stranger), *The Woman from Guizhou*, 103-122.

²² Chen Ruoxi, "Wo de e'meng" 我的惡夢 (My nightmare), *A Daughter's Home*, 13-22.

been unable to escape the dominating influence of his mother: "I'd originally thought that by becoming Canadian, travelling far from home and country, I'd be able to throw off all that feudal doctrines and teachings business. Who'd have thought that a single phone call could change everything, and I'd have to come back to play the filial son. Being a Canadian citizen means nothing; wherever he goes, a Chinese person can't escape a Chinese person's fate!" (19) He makes a pun on his inability to "put down roots" when he has no "root" [根 *gen*, a euphemism for penis] of his own. (22)

While the emasculation of men by domineering women is by no means an emancipatory or feminist theme, it is a refreshing aspect of Chen's fiction that the victims of the traditional family structure are male as well as female, and the perpetrators female as well as male. That the situation in this story is unusual, and needs some explanation, is indicated by the lengths that are taken to explain the background: the protagonist been born during the famine of the Great Leap Forward, and his arrival had made life harder for the whole family: "my parents didn't value boys over girls at all, my mother had been perfectly satisfied with two daughters, and hadn't wanted a third child." His two sisters had emigrated to the US and Australia, and had thus been "cleverer" than he in dodging their responsibility to care for their parents. (16)

The first person narrator of "A Reckless Husband's Defence"²³ represents an extreme case of a backward looking traditionalist, fiercely resentful of the social changes which allow Chinese women to organise and to demand rights, and of the parallel development of an independent spirit on Taiwan. He is clearly deranged, unaware of the seriousness of his actions and the charges against him, yet his abuse of his wife is revealed to be on a continuum of behaviour that he has felt was acceptable, or at least normal, and with which the extended family had not interfered: "I am the head of this household" (132) "I had no choice but to teach her a lesson" (133).

The three narratives are all indictments of the traditional Chinese family system in which the older generation of both sexes manipulate and dominate the younger generation, and in which men dominate and abuse their wives.

Li Li's stories, like most of Chen Ruoxi's (with the exception of the three above), are not structured in such a way as to provide detailed psychological portraits which represent specifically Chinese neuroses. In the novella *The Fallen City*, however, she presents a brief debate on Eastern psychology. Wu Jikang, a Taiwanese man, has just begun an affair with a Japanese American colleague, March. Talking about the problems of his

marriage in English gives him a useful distancing effect: a feeling of coolness and objectivity. (27). He tells March that his wife has refused to see a marriage counsellor with him, for she feels that an American could never understand Chinese people's problems. He feels that neither of them had really grown up when they first married, and now that they have matured, they've grown apart. March responds to this by asking whether he doesn't agree that this is typical of Eastern people: "that is to say, that the formation of the individual personality occurs very late in cultures that stress the family and clan, or is even unable ever to develop fully, psychologically. I think this is a phenomenon observable in both Japanese and Chinese people." (28) Jikang is unused to a woman making this sort of confident psychological analysis of him, and is rather offended. He deflects further discussion by his response that "Chinese and Japanese people are not at all the same, and nor are their cultures, you can't conflate the two like that." (28-29)

The above stories by Ouyang Zi and Chen Ruoxi depict heightened portrayals of some of the negative characteristics of Chinese culture and social organisation, embodied in characters with little or no insight or ability to escape their predicament. The implication is of a cycle of oppression. Authors risk antagonising readers and critics with such negative portrayals. In the most fiction of Chen Ruoxi and Li Li the predominant narrative technique is of neutral observer-narrators, or characters with whom the reader is invited to identify and sympathise. Rather than being alienated, the reader is thus invited to share the narrator or the character's "burden of moral contemplation."

5.1.2 Overseas Chinese and the moral burden of the Chinese intellectual

The wave of Chinese immigrants to which this group of writers belongs were a new type of Chinese diaspora. Sizeable populations of Chinese had migrated to the United States in the nineteenth century, but although they built close-knit communities and preserved Chinese customs, maintaining some links to their native places, they did not form vocal intellectual or political communities nor seek to speak for the Chinese diaspora.²⁴ A significant proportion of the post-1949 migrants from Hong Kong and Taiwan (many of whom had fled from the mainland) were more aspirant. They sought tertiary or postgraduate education in the United States and maintained much closer links to home. The growing prosperity and stability of Taiwan ensured that the educated and professional elite could continue to travel to and from Hong Kong and Taiwan (and from the mainland too, after

²³ Chen Ruoxi, "Mangfu de gaobai" 莽夫的告白 (A Reckless Husband's Defence), *A Daughter's Home*, 131-139.

1978), maintaining links with publishers and home audiences and continuing to concern themselves with the image of Chinese both at home and abroad.

Many overseas Chinese writers have assumed the traditional mantle of Chinese intellectuals and literati, seeing themselves as upholders of moral responsibility and mediators of the voices of the people.²⁵ Besides depicting the disappointment and pain resulting from the Chinese civil war and the Cultural Revolution, and the negative impact of these historical events on the Chinese psyche, these writers use their fiction to contemplate the challenge of Chinese modernity: What does it mean to be Chinese in the modern world? How can overseas Chinese in America preserve their identity? In seeking modernity Chinese intellectuals have to battle against a perception that that Chinese identity is inextricably linked to the traditions of ancient China past, and that to be modern is, by definition, to be Westernised. In the words of Prasenjit Duara: "What is interesting about the Chinese and other non-Western cases is that the aporia of having to be of the past and also not of it is presented as having to be both Eastern and Western."²⁶ They have to negotiate the competing paradigms for interpreting the history and life of overseas Chinese: 落葉歸根 *luoye guigen* (Fallen leaves must eventually return to their roots) versus 落地生根 *luodi shenggen* (Seeds sown in foreign soil take root wherever they grow).

Many Chinese intellectuals are critical of their compatriots who fail to live up to the standards that they set for Chinese people: Perry Link labels this the "worrying mentality" [*youhuan yishi*], a type of "positive 'what can we do?' patriotism", based on an inherent assumption of Chinese superiority. He argues that "the intensity with which Chinese intellectuals undertake this self-examination rests upon their fierce conviction that China can and should be an exemplary culture and society." This is not a chauvinistic patriotism, however, because "in the end it aims at a morality that is fundamentally human, not just Chinese. It holds that in a proper world, China should exemplify the best way to conduct human affairs. Other societies should - and would, in a proper world - emulate China."²⁷

²⁴ In 1998 Wang Guangwu gives a figure of 25 million ethnic Chinese in diaspora, more than 85% of whom live in Southeast Asia. *The Chinese Diaspora*, vi.

²⁵ For a brief discussion of the role of the Chinese intellectual see Perry Link, *Evening Chats in Beijing: Probing China's Predicament* (New York and London: W W Norton, 1992), Introduction, 11-16, and Rudolf G Wagner, "The Chinese Writer in His Own Mirror: Writer, State, and Society - the Literary Evidence", in Merle Goldman ed., *China's Intellectuals and the State: In Search of a New Relationship* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 183-231.

²⁶ Prasenjit Duara, "Of Authenticity and Woman: Personal Narratives of Middle-Class Women in Modern China" in Wen-hsin Yeh ed., *Becoming Chinese: Passages to modernity and beyond* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2000), 342.

²⁷ Perry Link, *Evening Chats*, 250. He qualifies his positive comments with the observation that Chinese intellectuals "have made 'Chineseness' such a powerful category, one that carries such strong moral connotations, that it obstructs normal lines of observation and reflection," giving as an example the Chinese

"Their ideal, which emerges from the tradition of Chinese literati, is to know exactly who they are, to be proud of it, to be respected for it by society, and to feel that this identity will not change. Rather than having to shift identities from context to context, they would like to peer inside themselves and sense a solid core - a set of values or a moral ideology that would provide a reliable guide to behaviour."²⁸

Two of the most prominent Chinese in the United States have dedicated their academic and literary careers to the formulation of increasingly inclusive discourses of Chinese identity. Tu Wei-ming describes his neo-Confucian concept of "cultural China" as being made up of three symbolic universes: mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore; Chinese communities throughout the world; and individual men and women, who may or may not be ethnically Chinese, who try to understand China intellectually and bring their conceptions of China to their own linguistic communities. Tu argues that a "fruitful interaction between Confucian humanism and democratic liberalism in cultural China has already occurred" and believes that the intellectuals of "cultural China" have developed a strategy for China's cultural reconstruction from the outside:

The so-called 'Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism' may have been the wishful thinking of a small coterie of academics, but the emergence of a new, inclusive humanism with profound ethical-religious implications for the spiritual self-definition of humanity, the sanctity of the earth, and a form of religiousness based on immanent transcendence has already been placed on the agenda in cultural China."²⁹

Leo Ou-fan Lee, a co-founder of *Modern Literature*, describes experiencing an identity crisis after committing himself to long-term residency in the United States. He felt "a deep-seated ambivalence toward the established forms of Chinese cultural practice at the time - a structure of conventional ethics and wisdom in the name of Confucianism with which I became profoundly disenchanted," but likewise, a fear of becoming too Americanized. With middle age, he outgrew this identity confusion and realized that his sense of being Chinese was too deeply rooted to ever experience total Westernisation. However, this has not led him to return to Chinese cultural conservatism. Instead, he has adopted a stance he calls "Chinese cosmopolitanism - a loose epithet, but one that embraces both a fundamental

student of American literature who "cannot conceive that the American professor Perry Link might not know as much as he does about Mark Twain, or that the Professor might know more about China than him." 292.

²⁸ Ibid, 248.

²⁹ Tu Wei-ming, "Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center," in Tu Wei-ming ed., *The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of being Chinese today* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994), 13, 32.

intellectual commitment to Chinese culture and a multicultural receptivity, which effectively cuts across all conventional national boundaries.”³⁰

Chen Ruoxi, Ouyang Zi and Li Li are all characterised in Taiwan as “overseas Chinese writers” (海外華人作家 *haiwai huaren zuojia*). Although she acknowledges that the term “overseas” can be traced back to the Ming dynasty, Chen Ruoxi maintains that she first came across the phrase in 1975, when she was invited to submit work for a column in a Taiwan newspaper labelled the “Overseas Column” (海外專欄 *Haiwai zhuanlan*).³¹ In 1987 Chen founded the Overseas Chinese Women Writers Friendship Association: both Chen and Li Li were active in such associations in the United States.³²

The importance of the role of overseas writers stems from their ability to bridge the political divide between Taiwan and the mainland: they are able to travel to and learn about both places, and to depict themselves as representatives of the Chinese people, outside the politics of either the Nationalist or Communist government.³³ Although she has often written about the difficulty of living on the periphery, Chen Ruoxi is aware of this advantage, which launched her own career: she refers to overseas writers as serving a mediating function, freer to speak out against both Chinese governments.³⁴ Li Li too acknowledges that being overseas, though painful, gives writers the “distanced objectivity which enables them to see similarities and differences between two cultures. . . . So the people who can write take up their pens, using their mother tongue, writing for the people of their mother’s soil to see, whether in order to speak their mind, remember, criticise, or reflect.” Chen Ruoxi speaks of writers who “with a burning social consciousness often eye improving overseas Chinese communities, admonishing them for being rootless drifters, and calling for a greater struggle toward political power and achievement.”³⁵ She is “very much interested in writing about Chinese living in American society. I want to write about how they think and live, their

³⁰ Leo Ou-fan Lee, “On the Margins of the Chinese Discourse: Some Personal Thoughts on the Cultural Meaning of the Periphery,” *The Living Tree*, 228-229.

³¹ Chen Ruoxi, “Chinese Overseas Writers and Nativism,” Prologue in Hsin-sheng C Kao ed., *Nativism Overseas: Contemporary Chinese Woman Writers*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 9-10. First published as “*Haiwai zuojia de bentuxing*” (The Nativism of Overseas Chinese writers), *Xianggang wenxue* (Hong Kong Literature) (September 1988): 18-21.

³² Li Li edited a volume of overseas fiction: Li Li ed. *Haiwai huaren zuojia xiaoshuo xuan* 海外華人作家小說選 (Overseas Chinese Writers: Selected Fiction) (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co., 1983) and Chen Ruoxi edited a magazine of Chinese exile literature, *Square Quarterly*.

³³ Particularly during the period when the People’s Republic of China was virtually closed to the outside world (ca 1950-1978). Perry Link notes the extent of the influence of overseas intellectuals in the PRC in the late 1980s, naming Yu Ying-shih, Tu Wei-ming and Lin Yü-sheng: “The major influence of these overseas scholars is remarkable, given that none of them has lived in mainland China since the 1940s and that they have traveled there only briefly since then.” Perry Link, *Evening Chats*, 192.

³⁴ Chen Ruoxi, “Chinese Overseas Writers and Nativism,” 12.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

attitudes towards their split motherland, and their problems of readjustment in America in the wake of the traumatic consequences of political chaos. I also intend to write about the scars of survival, the nuance and feeling of personal identity, and the vulnerability and ordinariness of being a Chinese-American.”³⁶

Both Chen and Li Li testify to their sharing of the internalised psychological conflict typical of overseas Chinese intellectuals, the “China complex” or “Chinese emotional knot” [中國結 *Zhongguo jie*]: “Chinese people are eternally entangled, heart and soul, in their place of origin.”³⁷ It is, according to Li Li, a type of nostalgia [鄉愁 *xiangchou*]. “Taiwan is my emotional home [故鄉 *guxiang*]; the mainland is my historical home [歷史上的故鄉 *lishi shang de guxiang*]; both places tug at my heartstrings.”³⁸ All three writers feel that by writing, they are somehow serving the Chinese people. According to Ouyang Zi: “I always felt guilty about living in the States and not returning to help my country. But since writing *Swallows* . . . and editing *A Collection of Stories* . . . I have felt at peace knowing that I have exerted my mental capacities for our culture and our society.”³⁹ While Ouyang Zi and Li Li have remained overseas, Chen repatriated to Taiwan in 1995, frustrated by the feeling that overseas literature was, “in the end . . . a peripheral part of native literature that did not easily blend into the mainstream”.⁴⁰ Writing alone was not enough for her: she was “sick of American life, and sick of writing fiction,” she wanted to take action.⁴¹

5.2 Chinese identity in the United States

In the majority of Li Li’s stories, the burden of Chinese identity is presented primarily as one of the past, characterised less by ancient Chinese tradition than by the legacy of the recent history of civil war and political division. While her early stories focus very much on those divisions, the passing of the generation scarred by China’s 20th century history provides the next generation with the freedom to move on. Death is particularly

³⁶ Chen Ruoxi, Yan Huo, *Haiwai huaren zuojia lueying* (Brief interviews of Chinese Writers Overseas) (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co., 1984), 54-71. Quoted in Kao ed., *Crossroads*, 7.

³⁷ Ibid, 11, and Li Li, “Qian ji” (Preface), Li Li ed. *Haiwai huaren zuojia xiaoshuo* 海外華人作家小說選 (Selected Fiction by Overseas Chinese Writers) (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co., 1983), 1-4.

³⁸ Li Li, interview with Chen Zuchan, “Li Li de chuanguo licheng”, in Li Li, *The Fall of a City*, 128, 122.

³⁹ Ouyang Zi, *Yizhi de yinghua - Ouyang Zi sanwenji* 移植的櫻花 - 歐陽子散文集 (A transplanted Oriental cherry - Collected Prose by Ouyang Zi) (Taipei: Erya chubanshe, 1978), 201.

⁴⁰ Chen Ruoxi, “On the Miseries of Writers in American Exile: Sanitized versions for Taiwan, Hong Kong and the People’s Republic,” in Helmut Martin and Jeffrey Kinkley eds. *Modern Chinese Writers: Self-portrayals* (Armonk, New York and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1992), 186-192. First published as “Haiwai zuojia de kunjing” (The plight of Overseas Chinese writers), *Jiushi niandai* (The ninties, Hong Kong) (May 1985): 14-16.

⁴¹ Chen Ruoxi, *Zhongguo Shibao* [The China Times], 11 May 1996. She did not in fact stop writing fiction when she returned to Taiwan, but has produced mainly reportage and essays since then. She has also been active in environmental and cultural circles.

prominent as a marker of this transition. In “Homeward Bound”⁴² the narrator is redeemed of his guilt about his misdeeds during the Cultural Revolution when he sacrifices his life to save a compatriot in New York.

In “Moon over West River”⁴³ the burden of the Chinese past ends for the next generation with the death of the narrator’s father. He has sought to impress the legacy of the past upon his sons through their names, Yaozong 耀宗 and Yaozu 耀祖, (“glorification of the clan” and “glorification of the ancestors”), and in the prized dagger he wants to pass on as a family heirloom. The younger generation only wants to escape from this redundant legacy: Yaozu, the eldest, achieves this by dint of his homosexuality, which renders him ineligible to receive the symbolic heirloom in his father’s eyes. Yaozong is pressured into accepting the dagger, but he later discards it on a rubbish tip. His girlfriend suggests that he change his name, and he resolves to follow her in a new direction: east, to New York, where he might start a new life unburdened by his father’s compulsion to look west, back to China.

It is similarly the death of her father that releases the US-based Taiwanese divorcee of “The Jews of Kaifang City” from the constraints of parochial and insular Chinese culture: her father’s dying wish had been that she remarry, but that whatever she did, she “should, never, never marry a foreigner.” After his death, the narrator’s mother indicates that she would be happy for her daughter to follow her heart, and she feels no compunction in marrying a Jewish American in a traditionally Jewish ceremony: “Her father was not there, and there was nobody else who would be bothered or have any objections.”(87)

As his grandmother lies dying in hospital, the American-born child of “Birds of Paradise Flowers”⁴⁴ takes from the house the huge bag of mementos she had kept constantly by her side for many years, delivering these to her in the hospital as a goodbye gesture. His emptying the house of these historical reminders of his grandmother’s tragic life is symbolic: his own future is full of promise and excitement, free of the burdens that his grandmother has carried with her for so long.

Chen Ruoxi presents only very few characters who ‘move on’ from a concern with their Chinese identity. The generation divide is clear, marked by the characters of “On the other side of the Pacific.”⁴⁵ The grandmother maintains: “How can we give up our traditions? As long as I’m alive, I’ll keep reminding younger generations not to forget where they came from. Being in America is all the more reason not to forget Taiwan. If we forget Taiwan, we’ve forgotten our roots. Then we’ll be just like a falling leaf driven by the wind,

⁴² Li Li, “Jinxiang” 近鄉 (Homeward Bound), *Birds of Paradise Flowers*, 25-68.

⁴³ Xue Li [Li Li], “Xijiang yue” 西江月 (Moon Over West River), *The Last Night Train*, 101-128.

⁴⁴ Li Li, “Tiantang Niao Hua” 天堂鳥花 (Birds of Paradise Flowers), *Birds of Paradise Flowers*, 99-128.

unable to ever reach the shore. What will we be then?" (113) "No matter how good America is, it belongs to other people. If we live here forever, our children will all marry Americans and our Chinese identity will vanish completely!" (139) Her granddaughter has a very different perspective: "People from Taiwan . . . do not seem to know what they want, and they feel insecure. So, they only talk about green cards and job opportunities. They complain about America and they complain about Taiwan. I don't know, but I identify with America, and I don't have the kind of complaints they have." (110) She asks: "Why can't the Chinese put down roots in America? . . . Their divided loyalty can only lead to frustration for themselves. Since we live in America, we should identify ourselves with this society and become Americans." (145) Her father concedes: "That is the right way to be, but it is difficult for my generation to do that." He admits "I haven't really taken part in American society." (144) The mother feels that a middle way ought to be achievable; preservation of Chinese traditions and cultures while in the American environment: "She had heard that Jewish people in America were very conservative about keeping their own traditions; their unity and outstanding achievements were a well-known fact." (112)

While Li Li's later fiction features mainly Chinese characters that are putting down firm roots in America, Chen Ruoxi's fiction features mainly those set to spend their futures as global citizens, travelling between the West and their Chinese homelands. Chen embraces much more strongly the moral burden of what it means to be Chinese; the inherent perfectibility of Chinese culture is clearly a tenet that she adheres to. Her depictions are "warts-and-all", but primarily sympathetic, even towards flawed characters. A Chinese reader will empathise with many of the situations her characters are presented with, the more self-reflective among them sensitive to the faults of the less noble characters. Taken as a whole, Chen's stories can be interpreted as exhortations to a continued engagement with how Chinese people do, should and could behave – primarily in terms of their social connections to each other, as children and parents, husbands and wives.

5.3 China or Taiwan? The rise of Taiwanese identity

China has a long history of incorporation and assimilation of differing ethnic groups. Significant and long-term political and ethnic divides were understood to exist underneath the broader realm of the overarching "All Under Heaven" or "Earthly Realm" (天下 *tianxia*). Rulers of very different backgrounds and ethnicities were able to present their reigns as a continuation of ancient Chinese traditions through geo-historical location, language and naming, or the use of traditional ritual and bureaucratic systems. This sense of

⁴⁵ Chen Ruoxi, "On the Other Side of the Pacific," *Inside Outside*, translated in Kao ed., *Crossroads*, 79-152.

continuity, of moral and emotional connection to the classical past, continues to exert considerable influence in Chinese perceptions of what Chinese identity means today. For most, the concept is cultural, but it is conceived of in terms of a Chinese “people” and “race” which is broader than ethnic, national or political categories.⁴⁶

Taiwan is thus unique in Chinese history in being made up of a population which is almost wholly ethnically Chinese, but where, in the last few decades, a significant minority has begun to define itself in opposition to China on all fronts: political, ethnic and cultural. Sub-ethnic tensions between the Mainlanders (外省人 *waishengren*) and native Taiwanese (本省人 *benshengren*) are slowly disappearing, along the traditional pattern of absorption and assimilation, but citizens of the Republic of China increasingly consider “Taiwanese” a separate category from, rather than a subgroup of “Chinese.” Just as “Chinese” (中國人 *Zhongguoren*) is identified in the PRC as the term which encompasses all the other distinct ethnic and linguistic groups in the nation, so the term “new Taiwanese” (新台灣人 *xin Taiwanren*, coined by Taiwan’s first Taiwanese president, Lee Teng-hui) encompasses all the ethnic and linguistic groups in the aspiring nation.

The anchor for this identity is the position Taiwan has assumed in an increasingly interconnected, globalised world: a legacy not of Taiwan’s diplomatic isolation but of the much publicised “Taiwan miracle” and the reputation of the island as a model of Asian modernity and democracy. Taiwan’s status is fiercely contested by the PRC, and a political declaration of independence is out of the question, but the security of the island is heavily dependent on that discourse of nationhood: international recognition of Taiwan’s *de facto* independence is one of the factors that has prevented China from attempting to recover Taiwan by force.

In the cultural sphere, Taiwan’s new identity is formulated by the intellectual elite using the latest in postcolonial theories, which acknowledge the complexities of the island’s colonial history, embrace diversity and hybridity, and are fully cognisant that identity is not a given but a continual work of reinvention and reinterpretation. Nonetheless, it is just this type of self-reflexive negotiation that marks Taiwan out as a project, and a nation, distinctly new and different from the one across the Taiwan Straits.

The unprecedented politicisation and the breakdown of the unifying category of “Chineseness” on Taiwan is naturally experienced by many as an unwelcome and

⁴⁶ According to Frank Dikötter race gradually superseded culture as the indicator of group membership alongside internal decline and the incursion of the West during the nineteenth century. Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China* (London: Hurst & Co., 1992), 6. In the twenty-first century, cultural indicators seem to be regaining ground, at least in the discourse of Chinese Neo-Confucians: see Tu Wei-ming, *The Living Tree*, 13, cited above.

threatening destruction of their traditional Chinese sense of all-encompassing cultural unity.⁴⁷ These emotions are often strongest in those whose families and histories link them to both sides of the Taiwan Straits, and those in diaspora who are unwilling to concede to national identities based on sociopolitical divides.

The work of Ouyang Xi, Chen Ruoxi and Li Li, generally characterised as “overseas literature,” has not been studied with respect to its contribution to “Taiwan literature”: the project of reading and writing “Taiwan identity” is a relatively new trend which tends to focus on younger writers who are explicitly devoting their energies to this task. Below, I will examine the portrayals of Taiwan and Taiwanese characters in the work of each of the three writers, and examine whether and/or how their work could be seen as commenting on or contributing to the rise of a specifically Taiwanese identity. In the case of Ouyang Zi, my primary source is non-fiction, since Ouyang Zi had stopped writing fiction by the time the discourse on specifically Taiwanese identity first emerged. In the case of Li Li and Chen Ruoxi, both fiction and non-fiction will be considered.

5.3.1 Ouyang Zi

Ouyang Zi’s fictional characters are all residents of Taiwan, but there is no indication whatever of their ethnic backgrounds. The distinction between Mainlanders and native Taiwanese, a prominent feature of nearly all social realist texts produced in Taiwan (particularly obvious in fiction by Chen Ruoxi and Li Li), is entirely absent. Her characters are only ever referred to as “Chinese” (中國人 *Zhongguoren*).

Ouyang Zi explains her concept of national identity in an essay inspired by a discussion on “root searching” (尋根 *xungen*) at a 1979 conference on Taiwanese literature at the University of Texas at Austin.⁴⁸ She writes that she has long been preoccupied by the question of whether “self-identity” (自我辨識 *ziwo bianshi*) should be based on identification with one’s place of birth or on ethnicity based on blood lines. Her article opens with the assertion that Westerners generally privilege environment (環境 *huanjing*) whereas East Asians privilege descent (血統 *xuetong*, literally “blood connections”). (153) Her evidence for this is the fact that anyone born in the United States is automatically American, regardless of parentage: a somewhat unrepresentative indication of any disparity

⁴⁷ For a concise discussion on the development of and the differences between Chinese nationalism and traditional (cultural) Sinocentrism see Wang Hui, “Zhang Taiyan’s Concept of the Individual and Modern Chinese Identity” in Wen-hsin Yeh ed., *Becoming Chinese: Passages to modernity and beyond* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2000), 240-241.

⁴⁸ Ouyang Zi, “Native soil,” *The track of life*, 151-168.

between Western and East Asian perceptions and legal practices.⁴⁹ Ouyang Zi claims that when she tells people in America that she was born in Hiroshima, they assume that she is Japanese and only took on Chinese citizenship on her marriage. (153) Later in her text she acknowledges that there are cases where Westerners do in fact pay attention to blood, as demonstrated in the incarceration of Japanese Americans during the Second World War. (160)

Ouyang Zi writes as if there were thus no question of potential tensions between identification as Taiwanese or Chinese (in terms of descent, native Taiwanese are also Chinese, of Fukienese and Hakka descent). She acknowledges that the younger generation of writers from Taiwan tend to link their identity to the island, while older writers, particularly those born on the mainland, remind them not to forget that their roots are on the Chinese mainland. Her argument is that this is simply a matter of both sides emphasising connection to their place of birth, and it is clear where her sympathies lie: the older generation “is naturally concerned about the lifeblood of the whole race” and “their field of vision is comparatively wider and longer-ranging.”(163)

Ouyang Zi maintains that it is people like herself, native Taiwanese but born and raised in Japan, who are the ones in a complicated position vis-à-vis their homeland. Her parents had entertained great fondness for the Japanese, and the family spoke Taiwanese and Japanese. They only learned Mandarin Chinese when they returned to Taiwan in 1945.⁵⁰ (163-4) She writes that she envies those born or raised in Taiwan as being free of having to make any choices between loyalty to their place of birth versus their ethnic descent. Although she has now lived in the United States longer than she had lived in Taiwan, she states that neither she nor any of her friends who immigrated at the same time identify themselves with America. She concludes her essay with the platitude that the decision as to where one's roots lie can only be made by an individual, and that this might be made regardless of either place or descent: “roots are where the heart is.” (167) Essentially, she herself, however, is “rootless.” This is emphasised in an essay written a few years later on the death of her father.⁵¹ In spite of her grief, she derives comfort from the fact that he would have been happy to know he was buried in the countryside of rural Taiwan, in his

⁴⁹ Continental Europe has traditionally based nationality on descent; it is generally only English-speaking Western countries that have offered nationality based on birth-place.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 163-4. Ouyang describes the difficulties her father had in learning Mandarin Chinese as an adult: he had to teach in Mandarin. Ouyang Zi, “Yifeng wufa toudi de xin” 一封無法投遞的信 (A letter that cannot be sent), *The track of life*, 14. Her mother wrote to Ouyang Zi in Japanese when she left Taiwan for university in the United States, although she had to switch to Chinese script when Ouyang Zi's younger siblings left home, as they, unlike Ouyang Zi, did not read Japanese. Ouyang Zi, “Wo de muqin” 我的母親 (My Mother) *The track of life*, 77

⁵¹ Ouyang Zi, “A letter that cannot be sent,” *The track of life*, 9-25.

native place (故鄉 *guxiang*): she quotes the phrase: “the leaves always fall to the root” (葉落歸根 *yeluoguigen*). (24) Ouyang Zi writes that she feels guilty about having her three sons born and raised in the United States, contrasting their situation with that of her brothers and father, who are very attached to their ancestry and native soil. (21)

5.3.2 Chen Ruoxi

In Chapter 2 I have labelled a number of the earliest stories of Chen Ruoxi as nativist, defined in terms of localist realism: the depiction of ordinary Taiwanese people and customs. This type of nativism must be distinguished from the political nativism of the oppositional Nativist movement [*xiangtu wenxue yundong*] of the 1970s, many of whose proponents moved on to activism and independence politics. Chen Ruoxi’s nativism would accord with C T Hsia’s perception of Taiwanese literature as only one of many regional literatures in China.⁵²

Chen was deeply committed to greater China: her move to the PRC in 1966 was courageous, undertaken in the full knowledge that this might mean a permanent exile from her native place. On leaving, disillusioned, in 1973, she gamely took on the role of the overseas Chinese intellectual, defining the literature that she and other overseas writers produced as “an expression of homeward longing . . . the very essence of nativism.” Nativism is not restricted to a single place: as an overseas writer begins to develop feelings for the new country of residence, “nativism expands to take on a double meaning, one for the new land and one for the old.”⁵³ Chen argues that “as long as you write in the Chinese language, it’s all the same, no matter what corner of the world you happen to live in. How can a single nationality go two separate ways?” She hoped “that we writers would not divide ourselves along lines of north and south, or left and right; nor make distinctions between those living in China and those overseas. Would that everyone could live together in harmony.”⁵⁴

Chen’s conceit of applying “nativism” to a certain type of writing, regardless of where it is produced, fits the pattern of the diasporic imagination identified by many

⁵² C T Hsia, “Closing Remarks” to the conference (and conference volume) on Chinese Fiction from Taiwan. Jeannette L. Faurot, ed. *Chinese Fiction from Taiwan: Critical Perspectives* (Bloomington: IUP, 1980), 234-245, esp 243-244. Whether Hsia would include Chen’s ambivalent but basically affirmative early work as representative of the “new variant of *hsiang-t’u wenxue* extolling traditional morality - filial piety, reburial of the dead, pilgrimage to a nearby temple to seek divine protection, etc.” is unclear: he was scathing about “the rise of pious *hsiang-t’u* fiction which is quite silly for its uncritical and unrealistic affirmation of the kind of morality that was denounced by the champions of the new culture decades ago.”

⁵³ Chen Ruoxi, “Chinese Overseas Writers and Nativism,” 15.

⁵⁴ Chen Ruoxi, “On the Miseries of Writers in American Exile,” 192.

researchers on diaspora: it is about “routes” as well as “roots.”⁵⁵ “What is important to individuals is not so much the need for a concrete homeland as the homing desire as such . . . and the need to continuously negotiate and understand the state of being in between the place of origin and place of destination.”⁵⁶ Because of the split Chinese nation, a writer who identifies with greater China can never be wholly at “home”: she can only ever seek to bridge divides, travel between places, communicate with Chinese-speaking audiences wherever they might be, and thus build a sense of the home which is the mythical place of a united cultural China.

While her early nativist stories may have been representative of any number of Chinese localities, once Chen ventured to the mainland, the politicisation of every facet of life in the Cultural Revolution included a particular suspicion of anyone with links to Taiwan: “At that time, many ‘ex-Taiwanese’ with relatives on the island [were] censured for having ‘overseas connections.’”⁵⁷ A large proportion of her Cultural Revolution fiction, and all of those stories narrated in the first person, feature native Taiwanese protagonists. The protagonist of *The Repatriates*, who can be closely identified with the author, is aware of a continual question mark over her because of her origins: “The propaganda said that Taiwanese were afflicted with such poverty that they had to sell their sons and daughters, so how could a farmer’s daughter have gone to university and studied abroad? She might be a spy!” (16) Her movements are restricted, and she is continually under observation. She recalls how proud she had originally been to say she was from Taiwan; within a year she reluctantly conforms to advice that she say she is from Fujian province. (27-28)

Chen’s protagonists stubbornly resist the politicisation of their identity in the PRC, resentful of being wheeled out like puppets for the benefit of overseas visitors. The character Du Baihe here serves as a mouthpiece for the author:

“Firstly, she believed that issues of identity (認同 *rentong*) and repatriation (回歸 *huigui*) were to do with feelings and emotions (感情 *ganqing*) and shouldn’t be peddled about like commodities. She had come over to the fatherland (祖國 *zuguó*) as a youth out of idealism and passion. After twenty years of the vicissitudes of life, her ideals had become like the horizon: visible, but forever out of reach. Yet she had never thought of separation (離異 *liyi*, a word commonly used for divorce), because of her continued attachment to her people (民族感情) What more could be said about that attachment to her people?”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ The terms are formulated by Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic* (Verso, 1993): grounded certainties of roots replaced with the transnational contingencies of routes. See also James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997).

⁵⁶ A Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 35.

⁵⁷ Chen Ruoxi, “The old man,” *Laoren*, 24.

⁵⁸ Chen Ruoxi, “Du Baihe” 杜百合 (Du Baihe), *Inside Outside*, 32.

As discussed above, in Chapter 4, Chen's Taiwanese protagonists tend to assert their identification with Taiwan in non-political terms. An attachment to food and language is the most common marker of identification with home: during the Cultural Revolution the protagonist of the *Repatriates* delights in her memory of the watermelons in Taiwan and is dismayed that such a simple sentiment is politically taboo. (27) She and a fellow Taiwanese declare that Taipei's food cannot be beaten "anywhere in the Far East." (113). The protagonist of "Du Baihe" relishes the visits of the one friend with whom she can speak in "the language of home." [自己的家鄉話 *ziji de jiaxiang hua*] (12) Neither her husband nor her daughter can speak Taiwanese, but she teaches her daughter the Taiwanese names of food. (4) In the United States, close female friends are invariably fellow-Taiwanese: "Fortunately she had Mingmei to keep her company. Otherwise, she would have suffered from severe loneliness and isolation." The two speak in Taiwanese and experience it as a comforting private language.⁵⁹ On the few occasions when her female characters do engage with other characters on explicitly political points, it is clear where their loyalties lie. In "Inside Outside", the US-based Taiwanese protagonist responds as follows to the rote speech of a PRC Party official regarding Taiwan's "return to the embrace of the motherland:"

Wenhui had nothing against the reunification of China, but could barely stomach this kind of dialectical nonsense. "Don't you think," she reminded him politely, "that there should be better understanding between the two sides before we can start talking about reunification? I know very little about the mainland, but I've also discovered that people on the mainland know very little about Taiwan."⁶⁰

In Chen's 1980s work Taiwan ceases to be a place that represents only her protagonists' childhood past, and begins to epitomise their hopes for the future. Lin Yizhen of "On the other side of the Pacific"⁶¹ declares: "Having been through the Cultural Revolution, I believe in peaceful reform. If you really want to do something for our people, you should go back to Taiwan and work for our cause." (121) After this story, Chen's first-person female characters no longer share Chen's biographical history of a previous repatriation and disillusionment with the mainland: for Yu Wenxiu of "The Crossroads"⁶² mainland China is "that far-away land – an entirely strange place for her, a place where she could probably never go." (36) "Over the past few years, Taiwanese regional literature and

⁵⁹ Chen Ruoxi, "Alan de juanxi" 阿蘭的捐獻 (Ah Lan's Decision), translated in Kao, ed., *Crossroads*, 318.

⁶⁰ Chen Ruoxi, "Chengli chengwai" 城里城外 (Inside Outside) translated as "Another Fortress Besieged" in Chen Ruoxi, *The Old Man*, 130.

⁶¹ Chen Ruoxi, "Xiangzhe Taipingyang bi'an" 向著太平洋彼岸 (On the Other Side of the Pacific), *Chengli chengwai*, translated in Kao ed., *Crossroads*, 79-152.

⁶² Chen Ruoxi, "Lukou" 路口 (The Crossroads), *Chengli chengwai*, translated in Kao ed., *Crossroads*, 16-76.

folk arts had gradually gained prominence. More and more, Wenxiu identified herself with native pride and felt proud of its growing importance; it gave her a new-found sense of comfort.” (31-32) In preface written on the morning of the Tiananmen Massacre in Beijing in 1989, Chen writes that she feels that Taiwan is now the only hope for China: “Taiwanese people are Chinese too. If we can do it, so can they. . . . Thank God for the existence of Taiwan.”⁶³

Chen’s short stories of the 1990s display another marked shift: many characters are no longer overseas Chinese but are very recent visitors to the United States or residents of Taiwan and Hong Kong. A number of stories show Taiwanese women repatriating to Taiwan, particularly in the context of making a new start after the end of a relationship. As with so much of Chen’s fiction, the negotiations being undertaken by her characters were clearly ones which she herself was engaging in, culminating in her decision in 1995 to leave her family in the United States and to return to Taiwan permanently, alone. In a newspaper interview Chen explained that she had considered returning for many years, but that having waited until her children had finished university, it was now her husband who refused to leave their Berkeley home: “Marriage is the beginning of women’s ‘paradise lost’; as mothers, their freedoms are even more restricted.”⁶⁴

While Chen has not become an advocate of Taiwan independence, her passionate engagement with local concerns, testified to in her collection of essays, *Creating Utopia*,⁶⁵ marks the end of her subject position as an overseas writer or as a writer trying to span the political divide. Her writings since her return indicate that she can no longer be classified, as she was in 1992 by Helmut Martin and Jeffrey Kinkley, as one of “that tiny group of Taiwan intellectuals . . . who are convinced that Taiwan’s goal ought to be a new cultural unity with the mainland, ultimately through political unification.”⁶⁶ While committed to cultural unity, she has long been pragmatic about the impossibility of political unity in the foreseeable future. Now that the era of Nationalist political oppression is over, she has thrown her lot in with Taiwan. She spoke as early as 1988 of the necessity of “a proper solution to the problem of Taiwanese political participation,” narrowing her cause of cultural unity to the attempt to bridge factionalism purely among overseas Taiwanese in the United States. Chen had initially tried to straddle two different Taiwanese cultural organisations, both pro- and anti- independence, but she eventually gave up on both in order not to demonstrate

⁶³ Chen Ruoxi, Introduction to *Guizhou nuren* 貴州女人 (The Woman from Guizhou), 1.

⁶⁴ Chen Ruoxi, *Zhongguo Shibao* [The China Times], 11 May 1996.

⁶⁵ Chen Ruoxi, *Dazao taohuayuan* 打造桃花源 (Creating Utopia) (Taipei: Taiming wenhua, 1999).

⁶⁶ Helmut Martin and Jeffrey Kinkley eds., *Modern Chinese Writers: Self-portrayals* (Armonk, New York and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1992), 186.

favouritism.⁶⁷ She writes bitterly about people from the mainland attacking writers like herself who seek to straddle the political divide. Most hurtful among their charges is the question: “How can a person without an ancestral homeland who doesn’t want our nationality talk about saving humanity!”⁶⁸ It is perhaps this type of incitement that has led Chen to resign herself to the impossibility of speaking and working for Chinese on both sides of the Straits: she has transferred the purely personal identification with Taiwan of her characters into those who acknowledge and participate in the political projects of the island, which includes the struggle for women’s rights, for the environment, and for the “nativist” project.⁶⁹

While Chen celebrates Taiwan’s uniqueness, she continues to emphasise the historical and pragmatic case for connection with the mainland: she sees Taiwan as setting an example for mainland China rather than breaking off from it. For example, in her admonitory essay: “Shouldn’t be forgotten, can’t be forgiven” on Japan, she chides the Taiwanese who claim the Sino-Japanese war had nothing to do with Taiwan.⁷⁰ Although she acknowledges the negative historical circumstances bound up with the introduction of the “national language,” Mandarin (國語 *guoyu*), to Taiwan, she declares herself firmly against any attempts to develop a written form of the Taiwanese language. She has given up trying to master the “pure Taiwanese” (純台語文章 *chun Taiyu wenzhang*) script developed by those advocating a written form of the dialect, for: “even I, a Taiwanese, couldn’t understand it.”⁷¹ She feels that the broader reach a script has, the better. Mandarin (漢語 *hanyu*) has a population of 1.2 billion users, spanning a number of different dialects; it would be suicidal for Taiwanese writers to restrict their audiences to those who understand the local dialect, now that Mandarin has become a commonly understood and shared aspect of Taiwan’s culture. She assures her readers of her deep affinity for Taiwanese and acknowledges the importance of keeping the language alive, for example on television programming, but feels that it should be a parallel, not an alternative, to the national language of Mandarin (國語 *guoyu*). She celebrates most of all the distinctive hybrid of “Taiwanese Mandarin” (台灣國語 *Taiwan guoyu*) comparing this “Taiwanisation” of the

⁶⁷ Chen Ruoxi, “On the Miseries of Writers in American Exile,” 189-190.

⁶⁸ Chen Ruoxi, quoted in Duke, “Personae,” 75.

⁶⁹ These are the concerns of the female character in Chen Ruoxi, “A Reckless Husband’s Defence,” *A Daughter’s Home*, 131-139.

⁷⁰ Chen argues that for their own self-respect, they should not forget the atrocities committed on the mainland during the war, or the suffering of their own, who fought and died for the Japanese in the South Pacific, and on both sides in China. Chen Ruoxi, “Bu neng yuanliang, buke wangji” 不能原諒，不可忘記 (Shouldn’t be forgotten, can’t be forgiven), *Creating Utopia*, 97-100.

national language to the regional variations of the English language in the United States and Australia. A form of Chinese which adapts Mandarin to include Taiwanese, Japanese and aboriginal vocabularies, this, she feels, is the best representative of Taiwan culture.⁷²

5.3.3 Li Li

In the preface to a reprint of her first collection of early fiction Li Li writes: "I'd left the closed, constrained Taiwan of the sixties, and like a student in cram class, read literary works [from the mainland] that had been proscribed for political reasons. I came into contact with the vestiges of the late sixties' European and American anti-war, anti-establishment trends, but this first taste of spiritual release and independence in fact served to make me more nostalgic about the place I had come from."⁷³ While the author may have felt nostalgic, her early works are by no means rose-tinted recollections of Taiwan. Like Li Li herself, none of the characters she depicts actually "come from" Taiwan themselves: almost all are specifically identifiable as either first or second generation Mainlanders.

Li Li's early stories, set in Taiwan, fit squarely into the genre of "Mainlander identity fiction," which has become a prominent and much theorised part of Taiwan's literary canon. The theme of her best-known story, "Professor Tan," a sense of redundancy and betrayal among the older generation of mainlander intellectuals, is a common trope that already featured in a number of stories by other contributors to *Modern Literature* at the time it was published.⁷⁴ "Night Tree" is a typical example of "military village" (*juancun*) fiction: stories set in the mainlander residential military compounds. "The great wind blows," more explicitly political than any other story by the writers discussed in this thesis, is one of the earliest examples of the genre of a specifically Taiwanese "scar literature," revisiting the political paranoia of the 1960s Nationalist regime. "Night Tree" and "Spring Hope" likewise hint obliquely at the February 28 incident and the white terror, with the disappearance of a history teacher critical of the regime, and the adoption of two children

⁷¹ For background on language policy and "Mandarinisation" see Yvonne Sung-sheng Chang, "Taiwanese New Literature and the Colonial Context" and Murry A Rubinstein, "Taiwan's Socioeconomic modernisation 1971-1996" in Rubinstein ed. *Taiwan: A New History* (London and New York: M E Sharpe, 1999), 285, 390.

⁷² Chen Ruoxi, "Tan Taiyu chuangzuo" 談台語創作 (On creative writing in Taiwanese) and "Shuo Taiwan guoyu" 說台灣國語 (Speaking Taiwan-Chinese)," *Creating Utopia*, 74-79.

⁷³ *Chuxue* (First Snow), Taipei: Lianhe wenxue, 1998, Preface, p. 7. The reprint is published under the name Li Li, and contains three additional pieces and one omission from the early collection, *The Last Night Train*, published under the pen name Xue Li 薛荔.

⁷⁴ See Joseph Shiu-ming Lau, ed. *The Unbroken Chain: An Anthology of Taiwan Fiction since 1926*. (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1983), 175. The best example is perhaps Bai Xianrong's "Dongye" (Winter Night), first published in *Modern Literature* in the previous year: Vol. 41 (October 1970). The story has been translated and anthologised in various collections: see Bai Xianrong "Wandering in the Garden, Waking from a Dream: Tales of Taipei Characters, translated by the author and Patia Yasin. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 172-188.

whose parents had “disappeared.” A likely explanation for the boldness of the author in depicting these aspects of the repressive society that called itself “free China” lies in the fact that the prospect of return to Taiwan had already been closed to Li Li, through her involvement in the Diaoyutai movement.

Chen Ruoxi’s Cultural Revolution stories were being published in Hong Kong at this time, but there was no contemporary fiction which depicted the political oppression taking place in the Republic of China in the same period. Taiwanese “scar literature” only took off in Taiwan in the 1990s. This story was published in a Hong Kong journal in 1978, and did not appear in Taiwan until 1991. In her preface to the 1991 collection, Li Li explains that while it was clear the story could never have been published in Taiwan at the time, several magazines in the PRC had also turned it down: this was a common predicament, with writers often unable to find publishers on either side of the straits.⁷⁵

“Dream Lens”⁷⁶ is Li Li’s only story set entirely in the then present day Taipei: “a survival story of a kid from the compound with no education or background.”(9) The fact that the main character is nicknamed Camel indicates that story is an allegorical depiction of modern Taiwan: a tribute to Lao She’s famous social critique, *Camel Xiangzi*.⁷⁷ The story gives insight into myriad aspects of Taiwanese society: the learning of English in school, Christian churches, college entrance examinations, military service, the rapid rise of tertiary industries (record companies, advertising agencies, small film companies) and the high turnover of small businesses. Political repression is no longer a serious issue; it has affected the narrator only in the most trivial way, when he had absent-mindedly entitled a love song he has penned “My Red Heart.” The song is banned “for obvious political reasons.”(7) The two friends manage to avoid the dangers of gang culture and resist the lures of the porn industry. Yet while the narrator learns from the fantasy film scenarios they are asked to create that “people derive . . . great joy from self-deception,” (21) Camel is sucked into the culture of vanity and wish-fulfilment of his clients. Taiwan, like Lao She’s early Republican China, is a maelstrom of change, not all of which is easily negotiable or conducive to the moral progression of the individual.

5.4 The biographical dimension of identity

⁷⁵ Li Li, *The Floating World*, 2. See also Chen Ruoxi’s comments on censorship, self-censorship and the problems of publishing: Chen Ruoxi, “On the Miseries of Writers in American Exile,” 186-192.

⁷⁶ Li Li, “Mengjing” 夢境 (Dream Lens), *The Floating World*, translated by Michelle Yeh in *The Chinese Pen*, (Summer, 1990), 1-40.

⁷⁷ Lao She, *Camel Xiangzi* is a picture of the physical and moral decline of an individual in the unjust society of China in the 1930s. The rickshaw driver, Camel Xiangzi, is transformed from a hopeful, hardworking individual to a demoralised, morally compromised failure.

There is a danger inherent in linking biography and birthright too closely to literary negotiations of identity. Some recent criticism in Taiwan tends to read the work of authors of different provincial stock as more or less straight transcriptions of the identity that bloodlines and birthplaces apparently engender, with the implicit premise that literary texts act as an empty vessel for feelings of identity that are already fully formed before the act of writing. At the endpoint of this logic lies essentialism and the notion that identity exists as a fixed or exclusive category.⁷⁸ Nonetheless, as indicated in the descriptions above, the starting points for the negotiations on national identity of each of these writers can be closely linked to their diverse biographies.

Ouyang Zi, alienated from both her Chinese and Taiwanese heritage by her early identification with Japan, has produced fiction which does not reflect the temporal or social surroundings of her characters: they are not grounded in Taiwan. With the exception of her two stories which relate to Chinese in the United States, her fiction does not refer in any explicit way to national identity on Taiwan, which is experienced by Ouyang Zi herself as a non-issue: for her, Taiwanese *is* Chinese. Her psychological fiction can nonetheless be read to a certain extent as allegorical depiction of the national experience of Taiwan, and of the personal biography of Ouyang Zi herself.

Chen Ruoxi's fiction is predominantly characterised by social realism, and the historical, political and even temporal backgrounds of her stories are grounded in reality: fictional lives and events are intertwined with actual people and events. The majority of Chen's key stories and many of her most memorable protagonists share her ethnic background and a good deal of her personal biography: many serve as mouthpieces for the author. Chen Ruoxi's literary portrayals of what it was like to be a Taiwanese in Cultural Revolution China are explicitly acknowledged to be semi-autobiographical. Yet while her own experiences culminated in her decision to leave the mainland, in her fiction she provides a number of different and alternative scenarios, which reflect both the decisions she made and those she did not make. It was during this period that Chen became more closely self-identified with Taiwan: she did not turn back to the island herself, but was forced to defend her Taiwanese identity internally, in self-defence against the demonising rhetoric about Taiwan that she was subjected to in the PRC. Likewise, in her later fiction, the deliberations of the many Taiwanese characters regarding whether or not to return to Taiwan from the United States, can also be linked to the deliberations Chen states she had

⁷⁸ My thanks to Margaret Hillenbrand for this observation in her comments on a paper on national identity in Taiwan that I presented at the inaugural conference of the European Association of Taiwan Studies. Discussion, School of Oriental and African Studies, April 2004.

been undergoing since the mid 1980s.⁷⁹ While biography does not dictate the outcome of the identity negotiations being presented in the fiction, it most certainly dictates the framework of the questions that Chen asks and the situations that she presents in her fiction, situations that would be familiar to a good number of the intended audience.

Li Li, like Chen, writes mostly social realist fiction, which reflects the circumstances of many Chinese in the United States. Although she spent her childhood in Taiwan, Li Li was born to parents from Nanjing, and her characters too are Mainlanders, originating in and cleaving to China. By the 1980s, most of her adult characters are neither obsessed with China nor wholly defined by their identification as Chinese: the United States is a permanent not a temporary base for both the author and her characters. Taiwan is the only place that they travel back and forth between: unlike Chen's characters, the second generation feels no compunction about a responsibility to greater China, and is no longer concerned by the political divide. By the 1990s, many of the stories feature thematic concerns without any specifically Chinese dimension, such as the novel *Kangaroo Man*.

5.5 Writing the other

National, ethnic and cultural identities are defined on the basis of differentiation and separation from outsiders, who must be categorised as "other" in some way. Below, I look at how "others" are represented in the fiction: Jewish Americans, black Americans, and other Asians.

5.5.1 Jewish Americans

A significant majority of the white Americans that feature in the fiction of both Chen Ruoxi and Li Li are Jewish: this ethnic/cultural background is a feature of almost every American character of whom a detailed description is given, and of a good deal of those mentioned in passing. To some extent, it seems almost as if it might be a meaningless marker, simply a convenient tool for a character (or the author?) to describe an acquaintance. For example, one of Li Li's characters in *The Fall of a City* meets some business contacts: he "guessed they were Jewish, from their names and appearance." (5) Numerous Chinese writers and sinologists have drawn parallels between the Chinese and the Jews in diaspora and vice versa. A Jewish sinologist writes:

To be Chinese, not unlike being Jewish, means to be inscribed in and by historical time.

Though not immune to the wish to forget the past, Chinese culture demands the transmission

⁷⁹ Chen Ruoxi, *Creating Utopia*, Introduction, 2.

of memory no less forcefully than the Jewish commandment *zachor* - 'you shall remember.'"⁸⁰

Bo Yang makes facetious reference to comparisons between Chinese and Jews in *The Ugly Chinaman*.⁸¹ Chen Ruoxi is explicit about her admiration for Jewish cultural continuity. She writes in an essay: "It will take much effort from all of us [overseas Chinese] before we can be like, say, the Jews, and win the recognition and respect of American society for our culture" (188)⁸²

The protagonists themselves display an awareness of the predominance of Jews in their circles they move in: when the US-based Taiwanese divorcee of one of Li Li's stories, "The Jews of Kaifeng City," tells her ex-husband that she is considering remarrying, the following exchange takes place:

"American?"

"Uh-huh."

"Jewish?"

She raised an eyebrow, as if to say: how did you know that?

He laughed: "Don't worry, I haven't hired a private detective to investigate you, ha, ha - I was just guessing. It seems that eighty- to ninety-percent of the foreigners that marry Eastern women, particularly Chinese women, are Jewish. Don't you think?"⁸³

Chinese characters in both Li Li and Chen Ruoxi's stories are portrayed as admiring many aspects of Jewish culture, as identifying similarities between the two cultures, and as seeing Jews as role models for Chinese. Negative or explicitly racist references to Jews tend to be restricted to older Chinese with whom the reader is not invited to identify.

Li Li's protagonist in "The Jews of Kaifeng City" has learnt from both her Chinese lover and her prospective father-in-law that there are descendants of Jews in Henan and that traces of a long Jewish tradition are still evident in Kaifeng city. As Mingjin's grandmother was from Henan, she thus allows herself to imagine a potential genetic link between herself and the Jewish American family she is marrying into. While the salience of national and ethnic identity as a defining characteristic of a Chinese/Taiwanese individual is reinforced rather than undermined by the protagonist's "imaginary community" linking Chinese and Jews, the protagonist's perspective is a novel approach to smoothing out the gulf that she might be perceived to be crossing by marrying out of her ethnic group.

⁸⁰ Vera Schwarz, "No Solace from Lethe: History, Memory, and Cultural Identity in Twentieth-Century China", in Tu Wei-ming ed. *The Living Tree*, 64-87.

⁸¹ Bo Yang, *The Ugly Chinaman*.

⁸² Chen Ruoxi, "On the Miseries of Writers in American Exile", 186-192.

⁸³ Li Li, "Kaifengcheng de youtairen" 开封城的犹太人 (The Jews of Kaifeng City), *Birds of Paradise Flowers*, 90.

The Taiwanese narrator of Chen Ruoxi's *Foresight* makes a similar connection when her friend from the PRC marries a Jewish professor of Asian history. The narrator has never met any Jews before, but she is impressed by Mike, who highlights for her various similarities between Chinese and Jews: the concept of returning to origins (落葉歸根 *luoye guigen*) and the sojourner mentality. She tells him that she has heard that Jews, like Chinese, are very closely-knit: his response, "No, we're very divided politically!" tickles her, and reinforces her sense of a parallel: "The more was said, the more it seemed that the two races were six of one, half a dozen of the other, not a thing to tell them apart!" They conclude their conversation with mutual pride that Chinese, Jews and Japanese have all been recognised as great races: any concerns the narrator had about her friend "marrying out" evaporate. (105-107)

In "On the Other Side of the Pacific" almost every major character has something positive to say about Jews: the female Taiwanese protagonist "had heard that Jewish people in America were very conservative about keeping their own traditions; their unity and outstanding achievements were a well-known fact," (112) "the majority [of Chinese] had a great deal of respect for them." (146) Her suitor from the PRC maintains that "the sense of unity among the Jewish people is worthy of our emulation. Overseas Chinese are as divided as loose sand." (146) The American-born daughter of one of these overseas Chinese says: "Chinese people should learn everything from Jewish people. They thrive and prosper in America, but at the same time they remain one hundred percent Jewish. Isn't this what the Chinese people of your generation wanted to achieve?" Only her Grandmother is prejudiced: "Jewish people are so stingy. I think we'd better not learn from them." (146)

The reproduction of stereotyped racially-based associations is common, not only in terms of the characters' prejudices, but also in the authors' use of Jewishness as a marker. The narrator of *Foresight* is pleasantly surprised at the appearance of the Jewish professor of Asian history: with his casual clothes, brown hair and straight white teeth he looks nothing like the picture she had conjured up after hearing him described as possessor of the "Three Fives:" "over fifty, five rooms, and five figures in the bank. (90-93) One of Chen's protagonists does not trust American lawyers: she finds her husband's big Jewish lawyer imposing and intimidating.⁸⁴ When a female protagonist leaves her sons and husband alone at home "it took them only ten days to transform the living room into what resembled a Jewish-style secondhand store."⁸⁵ In Li Li's "The Last Night Train" one of the brothers

⁸⁴ "Meishi lihun" 美式離婚 (Divorce with style), *A Daughter's Home*, 78.

⁸⁵ Chen Ruoxi, "Ke zi guxiang lai" 客自故鄉來 (Guest From the Homeland), *Inside Outside*, translated in Kao ed., *Crossroads*, 209-10.

indicates that he knows a Jew who is very interested in their family's things [souvenirs of the civil war].⁸⁶ One of Chen's characters in *Breaking Out*, recently arrived from the PRC, is having an affair with a Taiwanese man who had previously had a brief sexual liaison with a Jewish woman, for whom one of Xinxin's friends now works. The woman's makeup is always overdone, so much so that Xinxin cannot distinguish the smell of her perfume from the smell of her foundation. Her wrinkles are all completely filled with powder and her eyes are circled like a panda's. "Luozhi was right when he said Jewish women really loved to make themselves up." (80-81) Nonetheless, Xinxin feels she can see how Luozhi might have been attracted to the "hot, passionate aspect of Jewish women." (81) She is described as an exacting employer: Xinxin tells her friend to "remember, she's Jewish, she won't be taken advantage of." (84)

5.5.2 Black Americans

According to Frank Dikötter, evidence for a specifically racial consciousness in premodern China is slight. It was "the degree of remoteness from the imperial centre [that] corresponded to levels of cultural savagery and physical coarseness": the further away, the more barbaric.⁸⁷ Nonetheless, the colour black carries negative connotations in Chinese as in the West, and there are obvious social and class markers associated with sunburned, darkened skin. Early Chinese visitors to Africa revealed a distinct aversion to Africans: they were described as uncouth, licentious and lacking in filial piety and loyalty.⁸⁸ European notions of cultural and racial superiority over blacks were readily taken up by Chinese scholars and intellectuals at the turn of the century: reformers such as Liang Qichao and Kang Youwei formulated many speculative theories on race and eugenics, aimed at eliminating the darker races or amalgamating them into the superior "gold and silver" races.⁸⁹

During the early part of the twentieth century, leftist Chinese intellectuals began to draw parallels between their own beleaguered situation and that of Africa. In the PRC, racist discourse was subsumed by a discourse of political alignment with other developing countries, culminating in Mao Zedong's 1949 declaration that "racial problems are class

⁸⁶ Li Li, "Zui hou yechē" 最後夜車 (The Last Train), *The Last Night Train*, 122.

⁸⁷ Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, 6.

⁸⁸ For a detailed history of China's contact with Africa see Philip Snow, *The Star Raft: China's Encounter With Africa*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1988, p. 4. An earlier version of parts of the following three paragraphs have been published in Carol Rennie, "Travel as Work, Travel as Play: Two Chinese women in Africa," Anders Hansson ed. *The Chinese At Play: Festivals, Games and Leisure* (London: Kegan Paul, 2002) 201-202.

⁸⁹ See Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, pp. 79-89 and Philip Snow, *The Star Raft*, pp. 189-190.

problems.”⁹⁰ Only Westerners could be perceived as racist; the Chinese were “leaders of the victimized ‘coloured people’ in historical struggle against white imperialism.”⁹¹ Assumptions of racial superiority were, however, not totally subsumed by political goodwill: the Chinese sent to Africa by Beijing tended not to fraternise with the local populations in any way.⁹² African students in the People’s Republic similarly encountered problems in integrating: one famous account by an African student describes many offensive incidents encountered among ordinary Chinese, indicative of a people “either [...] supremely ignorant or supremely ill-intentioned,” who “in all their dealings with us [...] behaved as if they were dealing with people from whom normal intelligence could not be expected.”⁹³

These conflicting discourses of superiority versus identification inform each of the writers featured in this study. In their depictions of Chinese characters interacting with black Americans, the authors employ a range of strategies: Chinese characters represent racist attitudes, they consider issues of race and prejudice, and they occasionally attempt to subvert racist assumptions.

The only depiction of black Americans in Ouyang Zi’s fiction can be interpreted as a positive one: a black man reacts with poise and dignity when he and his partner are turned away from a restaurant in which the protagonist is dining with her American boyfriend. The Taiwanese narrator clearly feels some sense of solidarity: she claims that her comment, “I don’t know why they haven’t sent me packing too . . . after all, I am ‘coloured’ like them!” was an attempt to make light of the incident, but her reference to the fact that racism is not only directed at blacks renders both her and her date deeply uncomfortable.⁹⁴ In her non-fiction, on the other hand, Ouyang Zi cleaves to a discourse of racial superiority.⁹⁵ Discussing the differences between Asian and Western concepts of identity, Ouyang Zi indicates that she feels inadequate attention is paid to “natural endowments” in the United States. She cites psychological studies that support genetic and racial determinism, including what she refers to as A R Jensen’s “objective” findings that black Americans have lower IQs than white Americans. She details the ethnic rankings of Jensen’s survey, which put Chinese on top, followed by Jews, Japanese, non-Jewish whites, native Americans and then blacks, brushing aside the arguments against a simplistic interpretation of these findings as political

⁹⁰ Quoted in Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, p. 192.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 192.

⁹² Ibid., p. 195. Referring to the twenty-five thousand male Chinese workers on the Tan-Zam Railway in the 1970s, President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia remarked on the unusual fact that “We have yet to see a Chinese-coloured baby since they came here.”

⁹³ Emmanuel John Hevi, *An African Student in China* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1963), 186-187.

⁹⁴ Ouyang Zi, “Kaoyan” 考驗 (The Test), *Autumn Leaves*, 97

⁹⁵ Ouyang Zi, “Native soil,” *The track of life*, 151-168.

correctness. According to Ouyang Xi, in certain problem areas, such as the “black problem” (黑人問題 *heiren wenti*), America’s freedom of academic expression is “significantly curtailed. There are some things that are better not said.” (154-6)

Many of the characters in Chen Ruoxi’s fiction hold extremely racist views. These are usually presented uncritically, without any distancing narrative effects, although they are never voiced by characters which can be identified with Chen, and they are usually male. The protagonist of *Breaking Out* is alarmed and angry when he sees a black man looking into the car where he is kissing his mistress goodnight:

“making a horrible face, displaying a mouthful of white teeth, looking like a wild animal. He wanted to curse at the black devil, but he didn’t dare. Xinxin was well disposed towards black people. There was really no sense to it. People from the mainland all had this unconditional sympathy for blacks, as if they really were still oppressed and exploited. It was all the result of Communist propaganda. He’d long wanted to do some reverse brainwashing on Xinxin; to warn her that in America she should avoid blacks at all costs, stay far away from them, in order not to lose her status, and avoid unpleasant consequences.” (48)

The same character calls a black policeman a “nosy black devil.” (59) Musing on the unfairness of life (maintenance payments for an ex-wife), he reflects on the luxury of having no conscience: “like blacks, or blue-collar workers . . . lots of blacks don’t want the effort of looking after a wife and child, so they just up and off.” (193) Another maintains: “of course, some people are discriminated against, and it’s their own fault. Like black Americans, for example – why can’t they get their act together? Really, they’re an inferior race.”⁹⁶ Old Hu of *The Two Hus* is mugged at gunpoint and although he did not see his attacker is “eighty percent certain that it was a black devil.” (3) Old Hu is aware that “Chinese people’s racial prejudices were just as strong as white people’s. Old Mi [who has just asked whether or not the attacker was black] had been here only three months, and he bet he hadn’t spoken a single sentence to a black person, yet he was clearly prejudiced against them.” (5) Old Hu decides to keep his own suspicions quiet, following the example of his American ex-wife, who, even when she had been mugged by a black youth, had simply reported an attack by a “young male.” Hu decides: “If white women can oppose racial prejudice, he couldn’t let himself be weak on this point.” (6)

Female narrators are never aggressively racist, but they do feel a sense of difference and distance from black people. In “It might be a boy”⁹⁷ a husband is uneasy about his wife interviewing a black woman with regard to a surrogate pregnancy. His wife counters him

⁹⁶ Chen Ruoxi, “Mangfu de gaobai” 莽夫的告白 (*A Reckless Husband’s Defence*), *A Daughter’s Home*, 131-139.

with pragmatic reassurance: “Easterners aren’t yet into that line of business . . . who knows, we’re probably the first Asian customers! In any case, it’ll be your sperm and my eggs, it’ll definitely not be a black person that comes out....” (46) A black neighbour tells a sympathetic first-person Taiwanese narrator who is a property owner in Berkeley: “Now that I’m a property owner, I personally know how these [rent control] restrictions really hurt property values and victimize middle-class people like you and me.” (288) The narrator does not feel quite the same connection as he does: there is implicit disapproval in her observation that he “dated pretty young black women and lived a flashy bachelor lifestyle,” (287) and it is either he or his brother who eventually shoots at the squatters in a neighbouring house, precipitating the narrator’s decision to leave the area. (297) The racism of the Taiwanese character in *Foresight*: “You obviously don’t understand the marriage law here . . . we’re still in the African jungle as far as that is concerned!” (356-357) is presented without any critical distancing devices.

Most of the above examples feature merely incidental references to blacks. Three of Chen’s stories explicitly address the subject of race and feature Chen’s more interpellative, self-analytical female narrators, with whom a reader is more likely to identify.

In “A scorched cross on the lawn”⁹⁸ the symbol of the Ku Klux Klan is planted on a Taiwanese family’s lawn. The householder is perplexed: “We haven’t done anything bad to anyone. . . . And we’re not black either, so how could we have offended the Klu Klux Klan?” (84) The Taiwanese narrator’s local informant, a black housemaid, tells her that she thinks the incident may be a symptom of resentment on the part of the long-established (mostly white) residents: many of their Hong Kong and Taiwanese neighbours make ostentatious displays of wealth and spend only short periods of the year in their large houses. The racist implications of the incident are dismissed once the culprits are identified as local teenagers: the Taiwanese narrator concludes that the family simply needs to cultivate better neighbourly relations. She is pleased that the Taiwanese, normally so critical of blacks, owe in this instance sincere gratitude to an old black woman. The story functions superficially as a reassuring message that Chinese are not subject to racism in the United States and also as an admonishment against being racist themselves. On another level, it can be seen as depicting a rather patronising superiority towards black Americans: the narrator, dressed in scruffy clothes, pretends that she too is a servant in order to bond with the black

⁹⁷ Chen Ruoxi “Shuobuding shi ge nanhai” 說不定是個男孩 (It might be a boy), *Wang Zuo* 46.

⁹⁸ Chen Ruoxi, “Caodi shang shaojiao de shizijia” 草地上燒焦的十字架 (A scorched cross on the lawn), *Wang Zuo*, 81-86.

woman. There is perhaps self-deception implicit in interpreting the racist incident as simply a matter of envy of Taiwanese material wealth.

The Taiwanese protagonist of “Divorce American-style”⁹⁹ has married a black American who she had met in Taiwan: “Meilin had always felt that black Americans were much more charismatic than whites.” She comments that even in liberal California, it was very rare to see a black and Eastern couple, but that she had been able to ignore the stares because of the strength of her feeling for him: “‘This is love’ Kevin had told her, ‘Real love that can transcend race and culture.’” (74-75) The story is not, however, one of a successful cross-cultural relationship: Meilin is an embittered woman. Having married Kevin against her parents’ wishes, she had given up the opportunity of going to university in order to support him and then bear him two children. Subsequently, he divorces her and takes up with a Vietnamese woman, claiming that Meilin is not his intellectual equal. On hearing of the divorce, Meilin’s mother tells her: “I told you long ago that black people weren’t to be relied upon, who taught you to be so blind? Whenever we deal with black people, it goes wrong, on every occasion. Like all those African countries that go after our Taiwanese money - with no sense of diplomatic justice.”(81) This argument will resonate strongly in Taiwan, although there is of course another side to the story: in its struggle for diplomatic recognition in the 1960s, the ROC assiduously cultivated friendships with African nations. The sincerity of its commitment to these relationships was seriously undermined when the ROC lost its seat in the United Nations: realigning with white South Africa, it established an embassy in Pretoria in 1976.¹⁰⁰ Meilin asks herself, rhetorically, if Kevin might not be right: perhaps she is stupid to work herself to the bone, when “those black people, single mothers mostly, rely on the government to clothe and feed them, dressing up gaudily every day, making passes at men wherever they go. Apparently, they get more welfare payments for each child they have, definitely making more than they would get by going out to work.” (77) She asks herself “Did she want to become one of them?” and answers with an emphatic no – Kevin has defaulted on his recent maintenance payments, so she decides to take herself and her children back to Taiwan, regardless of his custody and visitation rights. (86)

“Where does the blame lie?”¹⁰¹ is narrated by a Taiwanese student who is searching for an explanation behind the murder of two classmates, one from Taiwan, one from Hong Kong. A black classmate has stolen one of the girl’s wallets. Initially denying the theft and charging Chinese people with racism for accusing him, the boy subsequently admits he took

⁹⁹ “Meishi lihun” 美式離婚 (Divorce American style), *A Daughter’s Home*, 73-86.

¹⁰⁰ See Philip Snow, *The Star Raft*, p. 116.

the wallet but murders the two girls when they call at his house to retrieve it. The boy lives in a rough area of town, but the story makes no attempt at an analysis of the boy's background, or of poverty, deprivation, racial divisions etc.: the question in the title is rhetorical. There is a reference in the story to the real-life murder of a Chinese student in Berkeley (presumably also by a black American). The Chinese students are simply victims of an incomprehensible injustice perpetrated by a black man.

"The Last Train"¹⁰² provides an even more immediate encounter with murder at the hands of a black man, in Li Li's only story featuring a black American. The protagonist is stabbed in a New York Metro station while trying to prevent an attack on a Chinese woman. Before the incident the murderer is described as having a predatory look: "like a black spider," with expressionless, goldfish eyes. It is, however, "not that the man was black but something else" that worries the protagonist. (157, 153) The author clearly aims to guard against any suggestion of racism in her story by introducing a long memory-sequence in which the protagonist recalls the last time he had felt fear in relation to the approach of a black man. He had expected an aggressive encounter but had been surprised to find common ground: the man was a Vietnam veteran who suffered the same guilt and post-traumatic stress about the killing fields as the protagonist did about his role in the Cultural Revolution. (153-156) The protagonist had learnt, therefore, not to be automatically suspicious of black people. This time, of course, his confidence is misplaced.

The authors are shown above to adopt a number of approaches to race. Chen's depictions of racist Chinese characters in particular are clearly designed to reflect Chinese racism rather than condone it; her sympathetic characters adopt conciliatory approaches to understanding racial issues. Nonetheless, through the almost universally negative characterisations of black Americans themselves, the overwhelming impression gained from the texts is one that perpetuates rather than subverts the discourse that holds that black people are indeed inferior, alien and dangerous to Chinese people.

5.5.3 Other Asians

A number of Chen Ruoxi's later stories, set in the United States, feature other Asians, also invariably portrayed negatively. For example, the Taiwanese protagonist of "Divorce American-style"¹⁰³ (who has married a black American, and might therefore be read as an example of a progressive, non-racist character) is full of racial stereotypes: a

¹⁰¹ Chen Ruoxi, "Daodi cuo zai nali?" 到底錯在哪里? (Where does the blame lie?), *The Woman from Guizhou*, 123-140.

¹⁰² Li Li, "Zui hou yeche" 最後夜車 (The Last Train), *The Last Night Train*, 160

customer who fails to buy anything from her stall is “not like a generous and open-handed Japanese, more like a money-hungry Vietnamese boat person.” (75) Her response to her husband leaving her for a Vietnamese woman is: “How could her husband be so bad? She always came back to a similar conclusion: it’s all that Vietnamese woman’s doing!” (78). The protagonist of “Just ignore It”¹⁰⁴ has been tricked by her overseas Vietnamese Chinese husband and his mother into divorcing her husband and forgoing all rights to their son and common property. Her mother’s warnings have been proved correct: “I warned you long ago not to marry a Vietnamese overseas Chinese. They might speak the same language, but with a different background, they’re different all the same.” (52)

People from mainland China also become “othered” in some of Chen Ruoxi’s fiction set in the United States. Chapter 3 includes a discussion of the sexualisation of Taiwan from the perspective of long-term residents in the United States. The PRC, on the other hand, is depicted primarily not as a dangerous place in itself but as a source of dangerous immigrants who steal the husbands of overseas Taiwanese women. The protagonist of “Ah Lan’s Decision”¹⁰⁵ blames herself: “‘The Taiwanese do not understand people from the mainland.’ This statement struck Ah Lan like an invisible dagger pointed at her heart. It was quite true that it was her idea to hire the woman from China. . . . Once she had been hired, Ah Lan groomed her with the proper clothes and helped make her presentable and attractive. Who would ever have thought that, in the end, she would steal Ah Lan’s husband from her. Ah Lan had no one else to blame but herself for this ungrateful act.” (316) The same situation is faced by the Taiwanese protagonist of *Breaking Out*: her friend comments: “How incredibly brazen! Only girls who’ve come over from the mainland . . . they get their foot in the door, and won’t stop at anything to get what they want, without a thought for what type of family they’re breaking up.” She too, admonishes the Taiwanese woman for having not having been aware earlier: “it was inviting the wolf in.” (152)

The stories “We’re going to Reno”¹⁰⁶ and “Woman from Guizhou”¹⁰⁷ present elderly Chinese men likewise feeling worried about the transformation of their wives from the PRC: both imagine that they have engaged passive, docile partners, and are shocked to find the women turning into domineering or demanding wives: “How could that poor little woman from Guizhou suddenly turn into such a monster, her hands on her hips and her eyes glaring

¹⁰³ Chen Ruoxi, “Meishi lihun” 美式離婚 (Divorce American style), *A Daughter’s Home*, 73-86.

¹⁰⁴ Chen Ruoxi, “Bu li ta” 不理它 (Just ignore It), *A Daughter’s Home*, 51-63.

¹⁰⁵ Chen Ruoxi, “Alan de juanxi 阿蘭的捐獻 (Ah Lan’s Decision), *Wangzuo*, translated in Kao ed., *Crossroads*.

¹⁰⁶ Chen Ruoxi, “Women shang Leinuo qu” 我們上雷諾去 (We’re going to Reno), *Wang Zuo*, 27-44.

¹⁰⁷ Chen Ruoxi, “The Woman From Guizhou,” *The Woman from Guizhou*, translated in Kao ed., *Crossroads*.

so fiercely.” (180) “His wife seemed to have become rather stubborn.... She was no longer that good-tempered, obedient woman from Guizhou.” (182)

As is the case for black Americans, blatant prejudice is often depicted from the perspective of a racist and not entirely sympathetic Chinese character. However, while the texts often guard against too negative an impression of women from the PRC by providing some insight into the mindset or circumstances of those women, none of the fictional situations in which Chen’s characters interact with other Asians provide any ameliorating features or positive impressions of those people. The text again confirms rather than subverts a Chinese discourse of moral and cultural superiority.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This thesis provides the first comprehensive survey of the whole of the published fiction of the Taiwan writers Ouyang Zi, Chen Ruoxi and Li Li up to 2000, much of which has not been translated into or analysed in English before. I demonstrate that the range and scope of the three writers is significantly wider than would be inferred through reference to the critical attention (in both Chinese and in English) paid to each writer to date.

As founding members of the journal *Modern Literature*, Ouyang Zi and Chen Ruoxi were both central figures in the Modernist movement. The fact that a significant proportion of Chen Ruoxi's oeuvre is better described as Nativist literature demonstrates the extent to which the polarised debate between the Modernists and Nativists was more political and ideological than one based in actual literary practice.¹ I have shown that the work of Ouyang Zi, labelled "Modernist psychological fiction" by the critics, *can* be read in terms of its sociological explorations: of adolescent desire; of the internalisation of real and existing patriarchal constructs in Chinese society; and of Chinese identity vis-a-vis American "others." I have focused on the work of Chen Ruoxi written both before and after the Cultural Revolution fiction for which she is celebrated. I demonstrate that some of her early Nativist work was as radical in its revisioning of traditional society as the Modernist writing was in its use of new forms and techniques. In my examination of Chen's overseas literature, I document her increasing emphasis on feminist concerns, in particular her depictions of modern Chinese women negotiating the patriarchal social structures in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

I provide the first comprehensive introduction to the work of Li Li, demonstrating that her writing represents a wide range of specifically Taiwanese genres: Mainlander identity fiction, military village fiction, and scar literature. It is in Li Li's work that I find the clearest demonstration of an antagonism between nationalist and feminist concerns: I show that she tends to use male narrative perspectives to present "identity" themes, and that in those stories female characters tend to be "erased". I demonstrate that her later fiction represents a new type of overseas Chinese literature: it moves away from nostalgia and "root-searching" to present overseas Chinese characters who are fully adapted to their host country, America, and who do not experience life in diaspora as exilic: they travel back and forth across the Pacific with ease.

¹ As is also demonstrated by Yvonne Chang in the first single-authored work on Taiwan fiction in English: Chang, *Modernism and the Nativist Resistance*.

6.1 Sex, sexuality and gender

In my analysis of sex and sexuality, I find that all three writers present in their early fiction an exploration of adolescent sexual awakening. Many of the stories of Ouyang Zi and Chen Ruoxi published in the journal *Modern Literature* in the 1960s depict the vulnerability of modern young women entering into physical and emotional relationships with the opposite sex, exploring the social taboos associated with the expression of desire. While Ouyang Zi's bold psychological and Western-influenced scenarios seized the attention of the moralistic critics, Chen, in an understated fashion, provides depictions of a traditional rural Chinese society that is tolerant and understanding of female sexual needs. I contend that this early fiction constructed networks of incitement to the exploration of sexual desire and self-expression in its student audience. It was Li Ang, one of these writers' younger contemporaries, who went on to become notorious (and later celebrated) for her explorations of sex and sexuality, but I demonstrate that these explorations were already taking place at the start of the literary movement that burgeoned at National Taiwan University.

In the context of a politically and socially conservative society, into which feminism had not yet been introduced, I find the early fiction of Chen Ruoxi and Ouyang Zi, young women barely into their twenties, bold and refreshing. Their active role in founding *Modern Literature* and the dedication they exercised in selecting, compiling, writing and editing material for the journal over a number of years demonstrates the seriousness of their commitment to the ambitious agenda of "creating new artistic forms and styles" in Chinese literature.² I have found no evidence that there was ever any question or difficulty regarding female participation in this literary endeavour. However, the adoption of gender-neutral pen names by all three writers and the avoidance of sentimentality or other styles that might lead to their work being identified as "women's writing" does indicate an early awareness on their part that masculinist preconceptions might lead to the marginalisation or trivialisation of the work of women writers.

Gilbert and Gubar describe the danger of women writers producing imitative work which seeks to appropriate the representative power of the masculinist norm but which thereby suppresses the knowledge of their own exclusion: a project of "bad faith" which results in "copy" work.³ Contemporary Nativist critics made similar charges about Modernist writers who produced what they saw as imitative work based on Western models. There are parallels in feminist and postcolonial debates on how the "subaltern" can speak:

² *Modern Literature*, No. 1 (March 1960): 2.

³ Sandra M Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Imagination* (New Haven, 1984), 69-72.

the difficulty of women writers escaping the masculinist voice mirrors the legacy of cultural imperialism whereby the native intellectual, "challenging dominant discourse by 'resurrecting' the victimized voice/self of the native[,] easily becomes complicitous with dominant discourse."⁴

In the early fiction of Ouyang Zi and Chen Ruoxi I would argue that the authors are successful in eliding this danger. Their participation in the Modernist literary movement was key to their establishment as serious writers. Within that movement, they write in a "universal" (ie. male defined, non-feminine) voice, and in a "modern" (ie. Western, non-Chinese) style, but at the same time manage to write, respectively, about the specificity of the patriarchal Confucian mold, and about the social reality of rural Taiwan which undercuts that Confucian morality. The "hybridity" of their Western-influenced fiction fits Homi Bhaba's description of "the translation of cultures, [which] whether assimilative or agonistic, is a complex act that generates borderline affects and identifications, 'peculiar types of culture sympathy and culture-clash'"⁵ The culture-clash caused by her adoption of Western styles and techniques and the alienating effect of what the critics dubbed "non-Chinese" psychological literature are the very features that enable Ouyang Zi to undertake what I read as a powerful (but non-direct, and therefore non-confrontational) feminist exploration of the patriarchal system and the way in which young women in Taiwan were socialised into sexuality. My interpretation of Ouyang Zi's fiction may not accord with the reception afforded by contemporary critics, but thirty years after the production of the stories, this interpretation is distinct and accessible to a feminist reader. Chen achieves her room for manoeuvre by using a "Nativist" style: sidestepping the attacks directed at "Modernist" literature, she is paradoxically able to produce a radical revisioning of traditional conservative morality without drawing the attention of the moralists.

After the writers had moved to the United States, they developed an awareness of the racial and cultural aspect of sexual identities. A number of stories depict self-orientalising strategies in young women from Taiwan. These are invariably portrayed as self-defeating: the outward appearance might be alluring, but the passive and silent Oriental woman which the characters associate with this role strips the woman playing it of autonomy and self-expression. Sexuality is a nexus where power relations immanent in female-male, hetero-homo, and white-Asian-black relationships are often exercised. I

⁴ Rey Chow, "Where Have all the Natives Gone?" in *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 37.

⁵ Homi K Bhaba, "Culture's In-Between" in Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay eds., *Questions of Cultural Identity*

indicate above that Riviere's conception of the feminine masquerade may have racial applications: the orientalising strategy may be a symbol of unconscious Chinese aggression towards the dominating West, just as femininity is adopted to hide the female who "wishes for masculinity."⁶

The associated discourse of a sexualised West and a purer East continues to dominate the fiction up until the late 1980s, when in fiction by both Li Li and Chen Ruoxi modernisation in Taiwan leads to it too becoming the sexualised "other" in the perceptions of long-term Chinese residents in the United States. Once again, the authors can be seen as occupying Bhaba's "in-between:" a privileged location which gives them access to hybrid forms of knowledge, so that they no longer operate in terms of "binary discourses of fixed individual and group identity,"⁷ but present a more fluid and complex picture of West and East.

In my analysis of the construction of the attractive Chinese (usually Taiwanese) woman, understated and subtle in both makeup and dress, I document how this construction is achieved through a process of comparison. Negative portrayals of heavily made-up Americans and unsophisticated, dark-skinned recent arrivals from the People's Republic are the foils against which more refined Taiwanese women are constructed. I also present in this chapter the various functions of the *qipao*: a marker of exotic cultural difference, but also simply of elegant allure. Chen Ruoxi depicts female attire as a politically subversive tool in Cultural Revolution China. In the context of the politically and morally repressive communist regime, she is affirmative of sexual expression. In fiction set in the liberal West, however, she is much more ambivalent about the positive benefits of sexual freedom and expression. For the adult Chinese women presented, sexual satisfaction is not of much import. A number of Chen's characters directly question the emphasis laid on sex in the liberal West, including the importance of sex as the basis of a good marriage. Sex is acknowledged to be important for men, but is not key to marital satisfaction for any of her female characters.

The writers in this study operate firmly within the framework of a normative regulatory discourse which channels sex and desire into heterosexual relations and the institution of marriage. The relatively bold early fiction, interrogating and exploring female sexuality, was undertaken when the writers themselves were young, unmarried, and sexually inexperienced. As adult writers depicting adult characters there is much less exploration.

(London: Sage, 1996), 54.

⁶ Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as a Masquerade." See above, Chapter 3.3.

⁷ Homi K Bhaba, *The Location of Culture* (Routledge: London and New York, 1994), 12.

The model of sexuality presented is strictly normative, and all the female characters are socialised into conventional sexual roles: female sexuality is responsive, contingent upon and at the service of marriage and family. It is also a potentially dangerous and socially disruptive force: women who feel the need to guard and police their daughters against the dangers of the sexually liberated United States.

There is very limited reference to homosexuality in the work of the three authors. The complete elision of the sexual identity of the gay husband in Chen's novel *Paper Marriage* would suggest that the very concept of a sexual "identity" is alien to Chen Ruoxi. In spite of its sympathetic treatment of the gay character, the novel can be read in terms of the power nexus immanent in relations between the sexes and the races: it reverses the usual subordination of women to men, and of the Chinese to the West. A socially and sexually conservative Chinese woman "gives herself" in marriage, but while she appears to deploy her body in the routines of a traditional relationship (cook and carer, domestic and loving), she is exempted from the sexual servicing of her husband, and finally "wins" her green card, financial security and independence: as the result of the death of a Western man from a "homosexual disease" that many conservative readers would see as symptomatic of the sickness of the sexually liberated West.

Sex means very little in itself: it is deployed by women primarily as a tool for satisfying husbands and maintaining relationships. These three writers can thus be seen to reinforce Dikötter's contention that sexual discourses in twentieth-century China have not imbued "sexuality" with the same meanings as Western discourses have.⁸ Sex (in terms of the erotic act) and sexuality are not conceived of as important parts of an individual's identity, or as a vital component of self-expression.

In making the above statement, I do not suggest that Ouyang Xi, Li Li and Chen Ruoxi are representative of a homogenous Chinese or Taiwanese discourse on sexuality: their work cannot be read as representative of "Taiwan women writers" as a whole. These three writers are not in the "sexual fiction" market: their contemporary, Li Ang, who has become the doyen of sexual fiction, operates a very different discourse: she is explicit that sex in her early work was symbolic, specifically connected with a search for identity.⁹ Taiwan readers who wish to explore sex and sexuality would find, from the mid 1980s onwards, no shortage of work that would provide a very different picture of the role of sex and sexuality in women's lives. The fiction under discussion here may, at different periods,

⁸ Dikötter, *Sex, Culture and Modernity*, 69.

⁹ Lin Yijie, "Panni yu jiushu" (Rebellion and salvation), interview in Li Ang, *Tamen de Yanlei* (Their Tears), (Taipei: Hongfan, 1984), 214.

have chimed with and/or contributed to the understanding of sex and sexuality of various sections of its readership. In the 1960s, it is likely that *Modern Literature* exerted a formative influence over its readership. Since the 1980s, however, the diversification and sheer volume of the fiction market in Taiwan has greatly diluted the impact of any individual writer. The greatly increased variety of the (increasingly globalised) media through which social messages about sex and sexuality are transmitted render the role of literature still less influential in shaping discourses. I would, nonetheless, suggest that the tenor of the discourse in the writing of these three women represents a fairly typical portrayal of the attitude towards sexuality of Taiwan's "middle generation" of women.

6.2 Gender and nation

Race and gender cannot be compared because they are in fact inextricable; there are no unraced gendered persons, nor ungendered raced persons. Racing and gendering are social and political processes of consigning bodies to social categories and thus rendering them into political, economic, sexual, and residential positions."¹⁰

In my examination of gender issues, I look at both the writers and their writing. I argue that the writers do not and cannot escape the vital problematic of the intersection of gender with national identity politics. In my analysis of the connection between theme and the employment of a male or a female narrative perspective, and how that narrative perspective affects the portrayal of women, I demonstrate that the use of male narrators, particularly in the work of Li Li, tends to reproduce stereotyped symbolic, biological and political roles for women in the process of examining male identity issues. The use of female narrators, on the other hand, renders the tension between gender and national identity issues inescapable.

I show that whereas the women of China and Taiwan are reified as representative of an idealised past by male overseas Chinese narrators, female narrators, of necessity, pay more attention to the modern aspects of these places: when their husbands have affairs with women from Taiwan or from the mainland, these characters have to negotiate between demonising the mistresses from their homelands or appealing to them as they seek to preserve their marriages. They have to consider what divorce might mean for them under Taiwanese family law if their husband were to stay in Taiwan and assert his custody rights. Female characters are thus concerned with contemporary gender politics, and want to see

¹⁰ Judith Bradford and Crispin Sartwell, "Voiced bodies/embodied voices," Naomi Zack ed., *Race/Sex: Their sameness, difference, and interplay* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 191-203.

progression, liberalisation and modernisation rather than a return to an idealised past. They are conscious of the dualistic nature of women's citizenship: on the one hand women share the rights of citizenship, but they are simultaneously subject to particularistic laws and customs which constrain their freedoms. If they were to leave their Chinese or Taiwanese husbands, they might be in danger of losing their children. Hong Kong and Taiwanese women who live in the United States are aware that while they might yearn for "home", they have better legal protection outside that home: here again we see the authors exposing the tension between gender and national identifications.

In spite of those tensions, female characters are invariably happy to embrace traditional supportive and caring roles as guardians and transmitters of Chinese culture: they work hard to prove their identification with their ethnic group: as good cooks, good mothers, good wives. They embrace conventional femininity, upholding it as a cultural virtue. Part of this constructed femininity leads to Chen's characters seeking to portray themselves as apolitical even where they are deeply political: she often has them exercise their politics primarily through the men that they choose to link themselves to rather than through direct action.

Conventional social roles for women are, however, questioned in a number of stories. While in her autobiographical stories Ouyang Zi depicts herself as a conventional good wife and mother, her fiction can be read as depicting the devastating psychological effect of the internalisation and exaggeration of the hierarchical Confucian gender conventions. Chen protests the egregious exploitation of a number of women who have previously accepted their subservient role within the patriarchal family hierarchy. Yet both Chen and Li Li are ultimately conciliatory when it comes to the double standard of male infidelity. Marriage is an all-important institution, and a significant proportion of their female characters value preservation of their social and cultural roles within that institution more than autonomy and independence, even where this involves self-abnegation and acceptance of their husbands' infidelities.

6.3 Nation and sex

The writers of my study all fit the paradigm defined by C T Hsia as “obsession with China,” in that they take their role as overseas Chinese intellectuals very seriously, seeking to speak to and on behalf of the Chinese at home and in diaspora about what it means to be Chinese. This involves both a forensic examination of the illnesses of Chinese society and exhortation to uphold what are perceived to be the positive characteristics of the Chinese cultural heritage. Many characters make reference to the strength and persistence of Jewish cultural traditions as a model for the Chinese in America. Other races and ethnic groups are generally portrayed negatively: culture and race are collapsed together, and the superiority of the Chinese in both respects is unquestioned in the fiction and non-fiction.

Although the discourses of racism and sexism are distinct, they are manifestations of social relations which operate along very similar lines of differentiation and domination: “Gender and race may be dependent on different existential locations, but they are not manifestations of different types of social relations with distinct causal bases, within distinct systems of domination.”¹¹ In my reading of both the fiction and non-fiction of the writers in this study, I find no indication that the authors share this awareness of the connection between the subordination of women in a patriarchal system, which they do protest, and the situation of those subordinated by racism, which they do not: on the contrary, they contribute to a racist Chinese discourse.

An implicit recognition of the interconnection between race and gender can be read in just one comment by one of Chen’s characters. In an argument with her fiancée she tells him that as she wants to return to Hong Kong from the United States, he should perhaps find himself a different wife who can secure his green card: “Whatever you’d like: a white one, a black one, or a yellow-faced white-hearted banana, whichever you choose, I’ll be your matchmaker.”¹² Her protest demonstrates that she feels she is being used, that she is a potentially interchangeable commodity, and that the choice of race in a wife is likewise, a choice of a commodity which he would subordinate to his own purpose: the green card. Yet the ostensible recognition of this interconnection is undercut by the lack of identification she displays for these black, white or yellow women: “yellow-faced white-hearted banana” is a derogatory reference to American Asians who are perceived to have betrayed their roots by identifying with their “white” home.

¹¹ Anthias and Yuval-Davis, *Racialized Boundaries*, 109.

¹² Chen Ruoxi “Weile liuxia, ni yao xian zou” 爲了留下，你要先走 [You have to leave in order to stay], *Wangzuo*, 97. See Chapter 4 above, 126.

As a woman reader, reading women writers, I seek self-consciously to “derive pleasure . . . from a power in the text that springs from a sense of movement, a genuinely felt and dynamic response to experience that opens a path to [my] own (e)motion: [my] capacity to be moved, to be dynamic emotionally and intellectually.”¹³ Chinese critic Rey Chow makes wider demands: I refer in my introduction to her call on Chinese writers overseas to use the privilege of their residency in the liberal West: “as truthfully and as tactically as they can – not merely to speak as exotic minors, but to fight the crippling effects of Western imperialism and Chinese paternalism at once.” Chow calls on women writers to “articulate women’s issues both as ‘dissolute women’ and as ‘female saints,’ but never as either one only.”¹⁴

The three writers in my study fulfil Chow’s exhortation to the extent that they employ both more and less sympathetic narrators, of both sexes, in various relations with members of opposite sex and with people of other nationalities. In their reflections on life in Taiwan, the United States, and mainland China, their negotiations on the relationship of the female subject to her sexed body, to her gender role, and to her sense of national identity demonstrate that identities are not static things, but complex and mobile relations. Their fictional articulations do not present solutions to the dilemmas of feminist versus nationalist concerns, but they present a picture of these dilemmas and detail how these affect different women in different ways.

The extent to which the three writers explicitly articulate women’s issues differs. Their articulations are also subject to the interpretation of the reader. I read Ouyang Zi’s “dissolute women” and depraved men as providing powerful insights into women’s issues that many contemporary readers failed to see. Ouyang Zi may not have consciously set out to fight the effects of Western imperialism or Chinese paternalism, but I argue that her use of psychological fiction is revelatory about many aspects of the operation and effects of these systems.

Chen Ruoxi is explicit that she does intend to write “consciousness raising” stories, and much of her later work draws attention to the abuse of women sanctioned by patriarchal discourse. Nonetheless, I find that when articulating the specificity of Chinese identity, and demonstrating their attachment and loyalty to that identity, both Chen and Li Li find themselves trapped into reproducing a traditional discourse which suppresses the knowledge of women’s repression in favour of appropriating the representative power of the dominant

¹³ Sarah Colvin, “The Power in the Text: Reading Women Writing Drama,” *German Life and Letters* Volume L No. 4 (October 1997): 458.

¹⁴ Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (Bloomington:

culture. Chen's wronged female characters may not be saints, but they are never "dissolute women." Chen raises the question of how to respond to patriarchy, but only has two solutions: self-sufficiency, or accommodation. Her open, non-didactic approach to negotiating how an individual woman might respond is one that I respond to as a feminist with ambivalence. On the one hand, this is an example of supportive "sisterhood": Chen presents every type of response positively and sympathetically, whether it involves the embracing of independence or of self-sacrifice for a self-defined priority, the stability of marriage. On the other hand, I find endorsement of the choice of self-abnegation a humiliating and self-defeating strategy. Although Chen articulates women's issues, her later work lacks a dynamic response, detracting from the power of her text. The feminist reader is moved, and her expectations are raised, but she is left wanting.

Appendix: Primary texts in *Modern Literature* (1960-1973)

AUTHOR		TITLE	ENGLISH TITLE	VOL	PAGES	DATE
Chen Ruoxi	若曦 [sic]	巴里的路程	The road to Bali	2	86-91	5/1960
Ouyang Zi	歐陽子	半個微笑	Half a smile	2	71-80	5/1960
Chen Ruoxi	若曦 [sic]	收魂	Spirit Calling	3	71-78	7/19
Ouyang Zi	歐陽子	牆	The Wall	4	79-89	12/1960
Chen Ruoxi	陳若曦	辛莊	Xinzhuang	5	94-103	11/1960
Ouyang Zi	歐陽子	網	The Net	6	75-81	1/1961
Chen Ruoxi	陳若曦	喬其	Qiaoqi	7	74-83	3/1961
Ouyang Zi	歐陽子	木美人	Wooden Beauty	10	43-45	9/1961
Chen Ruoxi	陳若曦	最後夜戲	The Last Performance	10	46-51	9/1961
Ouyang Zi	歐陽子	蛻遍	Metamorphosis	12	52-60	1/1962
Chen Ruoxi	陳若曦	夫人桃花	Peach Blossom	14	82-86	6/1962
Ouyang Zi	歐陽子	貝太太的早春	Mrs. Bei's early morning	19	64-68	1/1964
Yu Lihua	於梨華	等	Waiting	20	22-30	3/1964
Ouyang Zi	歐陽子	浪子	Prodigal Father	20	35-45	3/1964
Ouyang Zi	歐陽子	約會	Dating	21	1-13	6/1964
Ouyang Zi	歐陽子	近黃昏時	Approaching Dusk	26	76-87	11/1965
Ouyang Zi	歐陽子	美容	Meirong	29	153-162	8/1966
Ouyang Zi	歐陽子	最後一節課	The Last class	31	108-118	4/1967
Ouyang Zi	歐陽子	魔女	Woman Possessed	33	218-228	12/1967
Ouyang Zi	歐陽子	素珍表姐	Cousin Suzhen	36	4-15	1/1969
Yu Lihua	於梨華	兒戲	Child's Play	37	77-93	3/1969
Ouyang Zi	歐陽子	秋葉	Autumn Leaves	38	59-83	7/1969
Li Li	黎陽	譚教授的一天	A Day in the Life of Professor Tan	45	209-225	12/1971

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